

# **Sanskrit Drama in Performance**

# PERFORMING ARTS SERIES

*General Editor*

FARLEY P. RICHMOND

# **SANSKRIT DRAMA IN PERFORMANCE**



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*Dedicated to the memory of*  
*V. Raghavan*



# PART I

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## PERFORMANCE IN ANCIENT INDIA



THE FIRST of two major questions addressed by the conference was: How were Sanskrit plays actually performed in ancient India? Fragments of the answer are found in five general sources of information. First is the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (*The Art of the Theater*), a treatise attributed to one Bharatamuni but probably compiled by several authors sometime around the second century A.D. This massive work in thirty-six chapters is a practical handbook or guide for producers. All aspects of the theatrical art are considered. It describes, and some would say prescribes, in exhaustive detail the most effective ways to create a dramatic performance, from how to write the play to how to build the theater in which a specific performance will take place. The appropriate use of voice, dance, music, song, makeup, costume, properties, and scenery in varying dramatic situations is minutely analyzed. It is no exaggeration to say that today the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is the starting point for most attempts to reconstruct the ancient performing tradition; it is referred to again and again in the papers.

Commentaries on the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and other written references to early performance are a second source. Third are the Sanskrit dramas themselves. Since it was not the custom for playwrights to include other than cursory stage directions, the play texts are less valuable than one might at first hope. Specific plays are referred to when they cast light on performance. Fourth is the very considerable visual evidence of statues and bas-reliefs of dancing figures found in Indian temples. From them one can clearly see the bodily poses, arm and leg positions, and especially the hand gestures (*hastā* or *mudrā*) of classical dance. A fifth source lies in the dozen or so forms of regional theater that are living arts in India today. Most important of these is Kūṭiyāṭṭam of Kerala, in which Sanskrit plays of the classic period are still presented. To a lesser extent, Kathakali, Kuchipudi, Aṅkiya Nāṭ, Rās Līlā, and Bhārata Nāṭyam and other genres incorporate in contemporary performances theatrical practices described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

In the face of sometimes conflicting facts and incomplete information drawn from these sources, papers in part one describe how plays may have been performed. V. Raghavan establishes that a performing tradition in India preceded the classical Sanskrit

drama and that it can be traced with certainty as far back as the fifth century B.C. Then he sketches, in broad outline, the characteristics of Sanskrit performance as best can be derived from the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and from other supporting sources. In Raghavan's view, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is essentially describing how the major forms of Sanskrit drama (*rūpaka*) should be enacted. (These include the full-length plays of four or more acts, such as *The Vision of Vāsavadattā* and *Śakuntala*.) These are the plays in which the dramatic poem fuses with music and dance making possible the *rasa* response. Hence they can be considered the highest expression of theatrical art. In the minor forms of drama (*uparūpaka*) lie the seeds of present-day regional theater forms. (Darius L. Swann, in part four, gives a fuller exposition of this issue.) The minor forms are "minor" because they are essentially dance dramas, either totally lacking the dramatic poem, or subordinating it to music and dance.

A vital clue to how the play texts were enacted is to be found in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*'s elaborate code of acting (*abhinaya*). It suggests how it was possible for audiences to understand dramas written in a combination of Sanskrit—the priestly and courtly language—and in as many as half a dozen regional vernacular languages (Prakrits): the audience could follow the meaning of the play visually, through the codified system of hand gestures and facial expressions. Further, the manner in which the performer elaborated upon a situation, through movement, gesture, and facial expression, lies at the heart of the *rasa* aesthetic system. Rather than acting out on stage an important action as is usual in Western drama—the death of a character, for example—in Sanskrit practice the character is shown reacting to that action. The performer mirrors in ever more elaborate patterns the chain of emotional responses which an action triggers. Dramatic form and theatrical technique, it could be said, are designed to reveal and to express emotional states, and it is the audience's response to these emotional states that is *rasa*. Topics introduced by Raghavan receive more detailed treatment in other papers.

Kapila Vatsyayan describes how movement may have been used by the actors and dancers who performed Sanskrit plays in ancient

times. She distinguishes between mime (*abhinaya*), which the actors would use throughout the play, and pure dance (*nṛtta*), formal and abstract movement performed in time to music, which would be appropriate only in certain scenes. Vatsyayan stresses that the *Nāṭyaśāstra* meticulously details every aspect of the performing art because it is the interrelationships between the various media of performing—voice, music, staging, and movement—which are fundamental to the creation of the *rasa* experience.

Movement is of particular significance in Indian theater because, according to Brahmanic thought, the human body and its physical potential are manifestations of the universal spirit and soul. She notes how the movement patterns described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* are used in ritual preliminaries to each performance. The body parts and their movements, which are analyzed in great detail in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, are shown to comprise a whole system of correlatives to the dramatic text. In scenes from *Śakuntala* and *The Vision of Vāsavadattā*, riding a horse or entering “while seated” are enacted through certain gestures, gaits, and bodily movements, while other movements convey to the knowledgeable audience that smoke is rising, a deer has appeared, or the heroine is in a bower of trees and flowers. Hand gestures (*hasta*), together with the eyes, will precisely denote sorrow, joy, anger, and the other emotions (*bhāva*).

Major issues raised by the papers were discussed at length by the participants. One perplexing issue is how music and dance were integrated into performance. It appears that of all the elements of performance, the musical system is the most difficult to reconstruct today (Harold S. Powers). The *Nāṭyaśāstra* is a verbal source; scores of musical terms appear in it but at such a late date in history we cannot ascribe meaning to the majority of them. Unlike stone carvings, musical notes are not concrete and there is no certain way of knowing what the music per se sounded like in ancient India. Much evidence shows that classical music of today, whether southern (Karnatic) or northern (Hindustani), is completely different from that described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The tonic drone tone, for example, which is found in all present-day classical music, was unknown then. Although some of the mode or scale

terms in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* are retained in current usage, their meaning has changed. Because music was learned and passed on to succeeding generations via an aural tradition, imperceptible changes occurred in the music as centuries passed; with the death of each generation of musicians there was no one left who could know that such a change had occurred.

Musical instrumentation and music's function in a performance are better understood. A clue to how music contributed to performance is found in the aural tradition. The musician worked within generally known melodic and rhythmic patterns, improvising upon them as the occasion required. The "composer need not have been an original creative genius" (Powers) in this situation, but on the other hand musicians were expected to fill in many details of the music not indicated anywhere in the written play text. They brought to a performance extensive knowledge of theatrical music in general. They knew the musical repertory that was available and drew upon this in performance. Improvisation is a fundamental feature of Indian music in general; music within the theater was undoubtedly improvisational.

It is agreed that some music probably was heard throughout the performance, either songs or instrumental music, and either as a form of background music under dialogue, or to accompany movement across the stage, dances, and entrances and exits. The five types of interpolated songs (*dhruva*) described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* are of special significance in considering how music was fitted into a play performance. Yet they were not, except in rare cases, written or even indicated by the playwright in his dramatic text. They were chosen and inserted where appropriate by the performers themselves. One type of interpolated song was ad-libbed by the musicians on the spur of the moment: it was interjected if a performer missed a line, dropped a part of his costume, or committed some other performance mistake. That the *Nāṭyaśāstra* contains this kind of comment is clear evidence that it was intended as a practical performance guide (V. Raghavan).

Interpolated songs were certainly sung, in the common sense of that term, accompanied by both melodic and drone patterns. But what of the Sanskrit verses (*śloka*) in the play text, which in some

plays make up the bulk of the playwright's work? Today, Sanskrit verses are rendered in a vocal style which is distinct from that of the usual "song," and there is no drum accompaniment. One opinion is that verses were "sung," without specifying the precise meaning of the word (Raghavan).

As far as dance is concerned, it cannot be said with certainty how many dance postures or *hasta* an actor or actress used when delivering a particular line of dialogue or a particular verse. Evidence from regional theater forms is that virtually every word of the verbal text is, or can be, expressed simultaneously through voice and gesture and that the usual pattern is to elaborate on the verbal phrase four, five, six, a dozen times in physical movement. Some believe this pattern points to ancient practice (Raghavan and, in part, M. Christopher Byrski); others feel reserve in accepting this (Farley Richmond, Shanta Gandhi). Certainly, actors and actresses were trained in dance and their entrances, exits, and other scenes must have been executed in dance movements. Regardless of the amount of dance movement which may have accompanied the playwright's text, hand gestures and facial expressions were unquestionably important aspects of the performer's acting technique. Although there exists only circumstantial evidence, it is felt that major dance scenes not called for in the text almost certainly were interpolated in performance in the same way that songs were interpolated (Powers, Gandhi, Byrski).

This discussion leads directly to the question of the duration of performance. Raghavan cites many reasons to think that a multi-act play was spread over a number of days (or nights) in performance, and that it was not performed straight through at one time. Each act of a play has its own title. There is a tenth-century inscription from the Cola area describing a seven-act play which was performed over seven nights. The Indra festival, out of which drama grew in ancient times, lasted more than a month, and records substantiate the case of a play which was continued over more than forty nights. If the plays were enacted through elaborate gesticular language and with many interpolated songs and dances, as Raghavan believes they were, it would have been impossible to perform a long play in a single sitting. Further, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* describes certain types of plays and certain types of music



which are appropriate for morning, others for afternoon, and still others for evening, which suggests to him that there may even have been performances made up like a symphony concert program: Act I of play A, followed by Act III of play B, followed by Act V of play C, and so on.

Byrski suggests that performance of a play in ancient times was considered an enactment of a ritual sacrifice and since the efficacy of a sacrifice required that the full ritual be completed without exception, it would have been necessary to perform the full play. Perhaps the performance was spread over a number of days or nights, but enactment of only part of a play would not have been allowed. This suggests that caution must be used in accepting Kūṭiyāṭṭam performance as evidence of a drawn-out and extended performance style in the ancient theater inasmuch as in Kūṭiyāṭṭam it is common to offer independent acts in performance. For Byrski "Kūṭiyāṭṭam is an imperfect model" of ancient practice.

On the other side of this question is the consideration of *rasa* (Richmond, James R. Brandon). The aim of performance is to elicit the *rasa* experience in the spectator and this is described by almost all commentators as being a cumulative experience (the analogy of one's enjoyment culminating in the feeling of satisfaction after eating many courses of a meal is taken from the *Nāṭyaśāstra*). This strongly implies a kind of aesthetic gestalt reaction to a continuous artistic experience—the play; that is, a continuous experience in one sitting. It is hard to imagine how the spectator could be expected to hold in suspension over a period of many days each new daily additive response. The daily round of life—eating, sleeping, meeting neighbors, going to work—would also intrude. Questions relating to this issue that could not be resolved were: Are the cited examples of extended performances typical of ancient practice, or unusual? Were act titles given by the author or by later producers, perhaps even in times when the plays were no longer performed in the older fashion? (Brandon cites the example of act titles being added to Kabuki plays in Japan by later performers.) It is agreed that duration of performance must have been largely determined by the amount of gestural language used and by the amount of dance and song that was interpolated.

The physical stage is described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, but this ver-

bal description is susceptible to widely varying interpretations. Theater models have been constructed by scholars (including Gandhi) following these directions and they have come out looking quite different. We cannot turn for information to extant stages or auditoriums, or even to theater sites from the ancient period, for none exist. While details of the physical theater remain unclear, its general nature is not disputed: there was a raised stage with pillars that supported the roof and provided some degree of spacial separation of playing areas; there was little if any scenery; musicians were on stage; entrances and exits were through two doors at the rear; and a curtain of some type was used to alternately cover and reveal stage action.

# Sanskrit Drama in Performance

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V. Raghavan

*Chronologically the Hindu Drama stands solitary in a long void. By the birth of Christ, Greek drama and its short-lived daughter were dead. Toward 1300, the Chinese began producing plays and then from two to four centuries later, two groups of peoples littoral to the Atlantic and the Pacific: the West European nations and the Japanese. In the more than a thousand intervening years, the only drama of literary merit that grew up in the world was that of India.*

A. L. Kroeber

SANSKRIT DRAMA was first introduced to the West in 1789 in William Jones's translation of its foremost creation—the *Śākuntala* of Kālidāsa. Two years after this, the German translation of this play by Forster influenced Goethe who burst into a sonnet of praise for the play, imitated its prologue in his *Faust* and planned to adapt it for the Weimer stage. Interest in Sanskrit drama grew in France and Germany in the nineteenth century; even smaller forms like the monologue and the farce were studied, and histories of Indian literature, culture, and drama in general included accounts of Sanskrit drama. A definite stage was reached with the three volumes of the *Select Specimens of the Theatre of the Hindus* of H. H. Wilson in 1826–1827 (later reprinted in two volumes in London) which were immediately translated into German and French. This series of translations of six complete Sanskrit plays and short accounts of twenty-three others of all types did for Sanskrit drama what Max Müller's *Sacred Books of the East* did for religion and philosophy in Sanskrit. It was Wilson's ambition, as he stated in his

preface, to secure for the Hindu theater a place in English literature.

It can be said that that place has been secured. New translations into English of Sanskrit plays and studies of the drama form have continued to be written, both in India and by scholars in the West. It must be admitted, however, that contemporary scholars and theater artists alike, with few exceptions, have failed to devote similar attention to the performance aspects of this drama, which was for over a thousand years the only significant drama of the world. The time has arrived for this balance to be, if only partially, righted.

In considering here how Sanskrit drama was produced and performed in ancient times, we may first note the continuity of a theatrical tradition in India from the earliest period for which we have records. We come across the word for danseuse (*nṛtu*) even in the early R̥gvedic hymns, which may be dated about 3000 B.C., and we find the term for actor (*śailūṣa*) in the ca. 3000 B.C. text *Śukla Yajurveda* (30.6), and the ca. tenth-century B.C. text *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* (3.4.2.1). Pāṇini, the great grammarian of the fifth century B.C., speaks of short texts on acting, the *Manuals for Actors* (*Naṭa Sūtra*), written by two authors Śilālin and Kṛśāśva (4.3.110, 111). This shows that at this early date spontaneous theatrical impulses had sufficiently developed into a practical art requiring codification. The word *naṭa* used here links the art of acting to the earlier art of dancing. Both the words *naṭa* and *śailūṣa* appear in the epics. In the *Rāmāyaṇa* (2.30.8), we are told of a *śailūṣa*'s wife—an actress—who played various roles. This phenomenon is confirmed in the great grammatical scholium, the *Mahābhāṣya* (*Great Commentary*) of Patañjali, where we read that when an actress (*naṭabhāryā*) is asked, "Whom do you belong to?" she replies to whomsoever asks her, "To you, to you" (6.1.2).

Before we come again to the further copious and informative allusions to the art given by Patañjali, ca. 150 B.C., we should take note of Buddhist evidence, which is not, as Keith supposes, dubious, but quite specific and convincing as to the vogue of the acting of plays on specific themes by professional actors and their groups.<sup>1</sup> The evidence of the epics and grammatical literature shows that there were both male and female actors who took different roles in different plays. From the Buddhist *Pāli Suttas*, whose date may range from the fifth to the third century B.C., we know of villages of actors and that they had a chief, the *naṭagrā-*

mañi. In the *Gāmaṇi Saṃyutta* ("Discourse to Headmen," *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, 4.2), a chief of the actors submits to Lord Buddha the common belief—referred to by Bharata at the end of his *Nāṭyaśāstra* (*The Art of the Theater*)—that an actor performing his art reaches heaven. This chief is certainly the *sūtradhāra* or director of a performance (his name, Tālapuṭa, underlines dance as forming part of drama). This passage refers also to the stage (*raṅga*) and the gathering (*samāja*) where he performs (*rangamajjhe*, *samajjamajjhe*). But the most significant term here is the one by which drama is described as "true-cum-false" (*sajjalika*, *satyalika*), referring to the nature of stage reality. A further importance of this passage is that the chief of the actors speaks of his predecessors, the teachers and the teachers' teachers of the art (*pubbakānam*, *ācariyapācariyānam naṭānam*), which confirms a long and continued vogue of the art in the pre-Pali Canon ages. There is a second and equally revealing passage in the *Brahmajāla Suttanta* (discourse on various arts, crafts, games, pastimes, and schools of philosophical thought current among Brahmans) of the *Dīgha Nikāya I* where Brahmans are said to enjoy dance, singing, music, dramatic shows, and story recitations following a meal. The word used here for plays is *pekkhā*, or *prekṣā* in later writings. In addition to these, this Pali passage mentions a pastime called *sobhana-garaka* whose correct reading, as attested by the Burmese manuscript, is *sobhanaka*, a form of the theatrical art mentioned by Patañjali.

The Sanskrit Buddhist texts may also be considered here. The *Divyāvadāna* and *Lalitavistara* (third and fourth century A.D.) speak of drama. In fact, it is one of the arts learned by the young Buddha-to-be. Bimbisāra had a drama performed for the Nāga kings, during the time of the Buddha. The *Avadānaśataka* describes a drama performed in Śobhāvati, the Buddha's role being taken by the director of the acting troupe. The same troupe played also in Rājagṛha and Kuvalayā, their actress proving to be a great seducer of the monks. It may be noted that the *Avadānaśataka* refers to the chief of actors as being from the South. The Tibetan annals also speak of an actor from the South excelling over local monks in playing the Buddha's role. Buddhist Sanskrit drama went to, and prevailed in, Central Asia. This is borne out not only by the discovery there of fragments of the Mahāyāna poet-philosopher Aśvaghōṣa's plays, but also because these Sanskrit

plays inspired plays in the local Tocharian language, two fragments of which have also been found and which, according to Levi, fill the *lacunae* between Indian and Chinese drama.

Again before we come to Patañjali, we must look at the earliest fully available treatise on Indian polity, the *Artha Śāstra* of Kauṭalya, the prime minister of Candragupta Maurya of the fourth century B.C. This text, a veritable thesaurus of ancient Indian culture, contains references to actors, actresses and dancers, all of whom were employed by the state for espionage among the enemies, the undesirables, and the suspect of the kingdom. Besides *naṭa* and *nartaka* (1.12; 7.17; 11.1) the *Artha Śāstra* speaks also of *saubhika* (same as the *śobhanika*, 11.17) and twice mentions *prekṣa* (13.1), dramatic performances, as occasions when political activities, sabotage, or murder, could be carried out. The community of courtesans who were devoted to theater arts were under a state supervisor (*gaṇikādhyakṣa*, chap. 27) and their artistic work was organized and remunerated. Those persons, male and female, who lived by acting and the stage were called *raṅgopajīvin* and *raṅgopajīvint*, and the teacher who taught them was paid by the state. The *Artha Śāstra* mentions troupes visiting the capital from outside, which are also mentioned in the *Kāma Sūtra* (*Manual of Love*). Such visiting troupes had to pay a tax of five *paṇa*. In the Mauryan age (fourth century B.C.), drama was not only much in vogue but had developed so far as to inspire new experiments in dramatic form. The Mauryan minister, Subandhu, writing a play called *Vāsavadattā Nāṭyadhārā*, in which he dealt with a Mauryan court intrigue of Bindusāra's time, meshed it with the romance of King Udayana and Vāsavadattā, and developed the whole play as acts-within-acts, the actors of one act being the spectators of the next.<sup>2</sup>

The grammarian Kātyāyana of the Nanda-Maurya age (fourth century B.C.), who added critical dicta to supplement Pāṇini, makes an illuminating observation on the use of the casual and present tense form of a verb in respect to an event long past. His example is, "He kills Kamsa," or "He binds Bali," by which is meant a narrator or an actor reciting or enacting before an audience the theme of Kamsa having been killed and Bali having been bound. This usage is cited by all later writers on poetics and dramaturgy to explain the nature of drama and dramatic recital. Discussing this elaborately in the second century B.C., Patañjali says in his *Mahabhaṣya* (3.1.26):

There are the *śobhanikas* who kill Kāṁsa and bind Bali before your very eyes. Such events of the past are also presented to you in pictures and recitations; in the latter case, the *grānthika*, i.e., the reciters, use only the verbal medium and make you realize these past events in your minds; and in the presentation of Kāṁsa's killing by Vāsudeva, there are two groups of persons (actors), the followers of Kāṁsa are in red color and those of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa in blue. And among those who go to see this show, they also tell one another "Go, go, Kāṁsa is just being killed." "Go, Kāṁsa is going to be killed." Well, what is the use of going (so late)? Kāṁsa *has been* killed.

This passage gives us the following: there were two dramatic shows on the stories of Kāṁsa and Bali, *Kāṁsavadha* and *Balibandhana*; people thronged to see enactments of them; the faces of the two parties of the fight were painted; there were two types of performances, one in which there was representation through action and the actors were called *śobhanika*, a name we met with in the *Pāli Sūttas*, the other, in which the *grānthika*, who used only words, presented the same theme by narration. In later times, the *grānthika* came to be called *kathaka*. The two might well have formed part of one form in which the *grānthika* told the story which the mute *śobhanika* represented by action, as still happens in some regional forms.

There are further references to drama of this time in Patañjali's work: "He listens to the actor (*naṭa*)"; "he listens to the reciter (*grānthika*)"; "let us listen to the actor"; "let us listen to the reciter—with this idea they go to the theater (*raṅga*)" (1.4.29); or, "the actor sang" (2.4.77). The actress (*naṭī*) and the male actor playing female roles, who flutters his brows (*bhrūkumsa*) (4.1.3) are also mentioned. The expression "*sarvakeśi naṭaḥ*" (2.1.69), meaning the "profusely hairy actor," refers obviously to makeup and head-dress. Lastly, the theory of *rasa*, the doctrine of sentiments which dominates Sanskrit poetics and dramaturgy, was also known to Patañjali, for he speaks of an actor as a *rasika*, that is, either as the vehicle of *rasa* or as having a realization of the *rasa* to be aroused by his performance (5.2.95). This material testifies abundantly to an active Sanskrit theater with all its components: stage, male and female actors, dress, acting, text, themes, different types of plays, dance, music, and spectators and their reactions. This all exists by the middle of the second century B.C.

There are many references in epic literature also. References to

festivals and joyous gatherings (*utsava* and *samāja*) and to actors and dancers (*naṭa* and *nartaka*) are found in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (1.5.12.; 2.67.15) and the *Mahābhārata*. The two epics, it may be remembered, have always supplied the themes for Sanskrit plays. In the supplement to the *Mahābhārata*, called the *Harivaṃśa*, we have an account of special significance to the production of drama, to the epic source of dramatic material, and to the way drama could be used for political and other purposes. The *Harivaṃśa*, placed by scholars in the second or third century A.D., shows the performance of drama as part of the entertainment for the people gathered at the horse sacrifice performed by Kṛṣṇa in Dvāraka (*Viṣṇu Parvan* 2.91 ff). An actor named Bhadrānāman, or Bhadra, entertained a gathering of sages with an excellent play and the sages blessed him, saying that any role he played would prove a great success. Now there was at that time a powerful demon-king, Vajranābha, who had a beautiful daughter, Prabhāvatī. The king of gods, Indra, wanted to destroy him and planned the marriage of Prabhāvatī to Pradyumna, Kṛṣṇa's son. For this the actor Bhadra was used. With him, the Yādavas of Kṛṣṇa's side infiltrate the demon-king's city as a troupe of actors and start playing in a suburb of the city. Bhadra captures the hearts of the demons of Vajranābha's city with his play based on the *Rāmāyaṇa* story (2.93.5-6). Because of his excellent acting, he and his troupe of actors (*naṭa*) portraying Pradyumna and other Yādava heroes are applauded and presents are showered on them at every step during the performance. King Vajranābha himself then calls the great actor and orders command performances in his presence. Plays based on the stories of the descent of the celestial river Ganges (*gaṅgāvatarana*) and the ravishing of the heavenly damsel Rambhā by Rāvaṇa (*Rambhābhishāra*) are enacted by them. They perform other plays as well, which provide occasions for advancing the love affair between Pradyumna and Prabhāvatī. Eventually, the members of the troupe kill Vajranābha, carry Prabhāvatī away to Dvāraka, and celebrate the marriage there.<sup>3</sup>

Moving now to the period second century B.C. to the second century A.D., we find a wealth of written description of theatrical performance. The *Kāma Śāstra*, or *Kāma Sūtra*, of Vātsyāyana, in addition to being about love, is a veritable source book of ancient Indian culture. It is intimately related to Sanskrit poetry and drama, both of which are largely concerned with themes of love.



Among the sixty-four arts which, according to Vātsyāyana, the man and woman of taste should be accomplished in are literary arts, music, dance, and drama. Witnessing and appreciating drama (*nāṭaka-darśana*) is required. Vātsyāyana describes (1.4) the daily program of the urban gentleman of taste (*nāgaraka*). He spends the evening seeing dance and drama attended with music (*samgītaka*). Among periodic diversions are fortnightly meetings with fellow aesthetes in the local temple devoted to the goddess of learning (*sarasvatībhavana*) where visiting troupes of actors (*kuṣṭilava*) would offer them dramatic performances (*prekṣaṇa*). The next day the local men of taste should gather again to honor the visiting artists. They also arranged excursions to parks where their morning engagements included seeing plays (*prekṣā*). The drama is included among occasions for making and developing love (3.4), one given to theatergoing being counted among those whom women like (5.1; 6.1).

Here we can also consider the Buddhist writer Aśvaghoṣa, who is placed variously from the first century B.C. to the second century A.D. He wrote a play, or plays, on the life of the Buddha and the Buddha's conversion of Śāriputra, fragments of which were discovered in Turfan in Central Asia. Some of these fragments show on the one hand the use of abstract concepts such as Knowledge (*buddhi*) and Firmness (*dhṛti*) as characters, and on the other, characters of the social play (*prakaraṇa*), including a courtesan, a clown (*vidūṣaka*), and a rogue.<sup>4</sup> These, taken along with the act-within-act dramatic series of the earlier playwright Subandhu, point to a long history during which Sanskrit drama grew and developed its many types or forms.

We come to *terra firma* with the creations of the playwrights Kālidāsa (ca. 100 B.C., or A.D. 400) and Śūdraka (third to sixth century A.D.). The stage, the curtain, the green room, the preliminary music, the stage manager or producer (*sūtradhāra*), the use of music and dance, the types of roles, male and female actors, the method of presentation and technique of action, dialogue and its characteristics, the different modes of address such as the aside, speaking within oneself, speaking in the air—all these are as much reflected in the texts of the plays themselves as in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata. The prologues to the plays refer to the occasion and place of production. The stage directions given by the poets in the course of the texts of the plays, for entries and exits and for the dif-

ferent movements and actions of the actors while on the stage, have a direct bearing on the production of the plays. The drama, whatever its type, is, as a thing presented on the stage, called a *pratyoga*, meaning a production, and it is by this term or by its verbal forms that the coming play is referred to in the prologues. The prologues also contain interesting notes on the actors, their makeup, the green room, the director and his wife or understudy, the effort and care that actors should take with their parts, the rivalry between groups of actors, and the friendship which certain playwrights like Bhavabhūti enjoyed with actors and producers.

While the plays themselves vouch for their production during the classical age, we may note some external evidence, historical and literary, on the continuity of production and some of the details of this complex activity. In the post-Kālidāsa period, the plays of King Harṣavardhana of Kanauj (A.D. 606–648) enjoyed a great vogue, partly because of their imperial author and partly because of the inherent qualities of his plays. According to the account of the Chinese traveler I-Tsing, the royal author had his drama on the Bodhisattva's self-sacrifice, the *Nāgānanda* (*Delight of Snakes*), staged with music and dance during a *mela*, or religious gathering, that he held.

At the end of eighth century A.D., Dāmodaragupta, minister of King Jayāpīḍa, a great enthusiast of dance and drama, wrote a poem called *Kuṭṭantmata* in which he described the enactment of the opening act of the classical drama *Ratnāvali* of King Harṣavardhana. The venue is Banaras. A prince, Samarabhaṭa, who had come there on a pilgrimage, inquires of a dance master what the state of dance and drama in that city may be (vv. 793 ff). He replies that he migrated to Banaras on the death of the royal dramatist. He has a drama troupe of pupils which is trained in presenting *Ratnāvali*. This troupe consists wholly of actresses who play both the female and male roles. His chief pupil is Mañjarī, who plays the title role. In the course of praising her art, the teacher refers to the essential qualities and components of acting: effort and training; natural beauty; skill in different poses and grace of movement; proper intonation of the words of the text; nourishment of *rasa* that must be conveyed with concentration; identification with the feelings portrayed and the manifestation of the voluntary physical reactions of those feelings (*sattva*), which earlier the teacher emphasized as the most essential thing in acting; gestures of the hands

with the appropriate turns of the arms and many other points. Expert actress that Mañjarī is, she can remove completely from the hearts of the spectators the sense of duality, the character versus the actor, and elicit their exclamations of admiration. While some actions may be common to the pangs of separation in love and actual pathos, she can, with her skill, show the subtle distinction between the two states (vv. 803-809).

Then the actual presentation of the opening act of *Ratnāvalī* with Mañjarī and other actresses begins. The poem describes the setting of the whole orchestra, the entry of the stage manager to the music of the flute and songs relating to his entry (*prāveśikī dhruvā*), the other types of songs (*dhruvā*), and the introduction of the play. It then brings on the characters of the main act—Minister Yaugandharāyaṇa and King Udayana—to witness the spring festival going on in the grounds below. It follows the action of the act step by step. The main and attendant feelings (*bhāva*) to be portrayed by the different actors are mentioned. Then the explanation of how the festival is to be portrayed by the actors through improvisations of several amorous acts is given. As we read further, we find instructions for the actor on how the text written by the dramatist was to be integrated with music and dance, and how a passage or verse was to be interpreted. Two maids of the palace enter dancing and recite a verse about the god of love hitting with his flower-arrows the hearts of lovers already made soft by the spring season. How this is to be rendered in hand gestures and poses of the limbs is set forth. Then the king, looking on and enjoying the dance of the maids in a spirit of abandon, praises them in a verse of his own. That the actor playing the king's role is to interpret this verse and bring out its meaning through improvisation, reveals a most important aspect of how the art of acting (*abhinaya*) functions in Indian drama. The maids are then said to exit behind the curtain and when Queen Vāsavadattā enters with her retinue, the curtain is said to be removed. At the end of the act, the king, along with others, is said to leave the stage to the exit-song, *naiṣkrāmikī dhruvā*. The producer of the play (*nṛtyācārya*) receives from the prince a whole village as a present for the performance.

In a further series of observations that follows, the essentials of the performance are emphasized: the music and its elements and qualities; the soft and the vigorous tempos and styles; musical instruments and rhythm; the delivery of speeches in Sanskrit and

Prakrit with appropriate pitch, intonation, and clarity; the nature of the characters portrayed, their emotional states, their makeup, their acting; and the well-knit plot. A practical realization of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is to be seen here.

The four early monologues in the collection called *Caturbhāṇī*, which might have been written in the Gupta and later Gupta period, have some data bearing on the performance of Sanskrit plays. They also indicate that courtesans are skilled in the art of theater and that the local temple is the place where performances are given. In Śūdraka's play, *Padmaprābhṛtaka* (*The Lotus Present*), we come across an assistant to a drama teacher, Darduraka, who is sent by his teacher to the courtesan Devasenā, who is to play the part of the heroine Kumudvatī, to give her the text relating to her portions in the play copied out on palm leaves. Vararuci's play, *Ubhayābhisārika* (*Double Trust*), starts with the acting of a love play by a courtesan Madanasenā in the temple of Nārāyaṇa. Towards the end, the same monologue mentions a contest between two courtesan-dancers in the acting of the play *Purandara-vijaya* (*Triumph of Indra*) in the temple in Kusumapura (Patna).

In Jain literature, we may cite the didactic text, *Uttarapurāṇa*, by Guṇabhadra, written under the Rāṣṭrakūṭas in the Deccan in the end of the ninth century. In chapter 47 of this work (vv. 17-18), a famous actor (*naṭa*) named Vāsava is mentioned as being adept in playing women's roles and an actress (*naṭī*) named Madanavegā as capable of playing male roles.

Reference was made to King Javāpiḍa of Kashmir as one who evinced great zeal for dance and drama. Besides Dāmodaragupta, who wrote the *Kuṭṭanīmata* already mentioned, another minister of his, Udbhaṭa, was a writer on poetics. Udbhaṭa wrote a commentary on Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* which started a series of commentaries on and expositions of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* by Kashmirian scholars—Lollaṭa, Śaṅkuka, Nāyaka, and Abhinavagupta, among them. These writings all demonstrate interest in the practical side of drama. The commentary of Abhinavagupta is a mine of information on the production of Sanskrit plays. Apart from his elucidations and his own views, he makes precious quotations from lost works on various questions of Sanskrit drama and production.

Now we must turn to the *Nāṭyaśāstra* itself, by Bharata, in thirty-six chapters and usually considered to consist of 6,000 verses. It is the most elaborate treatise on drama and its produc-

tion ever written. According to the framework of the text, Bharata is the sage-teacher of theater arts. But the word *bharata* also means actor and is taken as signifying in its three constituent syllables, the three arts of drama, music, and dance based on emotion, melody, and rhythm. The word *nāṭya* also meant the whole of this triune art; it is primarily drama enriched with music and dance. A later synonym of *nāṭya* is *saṃgītaka* and that term, too, meant dramatic presentation with music and dance. From the beginning, through the classical ages, and to later and modern times when we still have the surviving traditional theaters of the different regions of India, the drama has been this same composite art—a total theater. *Nāṭya*, or theater, is also the mother of the other visual arts; as the *Viṣṇudharmottara* (1.3.2.3) says, it is on the states of beings in different moods and the consequent attitudes and poses as seen in *nāṭya*, that comprehension of both sculpture and painting<sup>5</sup> is based, ... of sculpture or a drawing being but the artist's capture of a moment in the moving sequence of *nāṭya*. The *Mahābhāṣya*, as we have already seen, and the *Viṣṇudharmottara* apply the same principle and aesthetic to poetry, drama, sculpture, and painting. It is to Bharata and his *Nāṭyaśāstra* that we have to go for a full appreciation of this conception of *nāṭya*.

Traditional Indian drama today flourishes in the open, in fields and in front of temples, and within temple corridors and halls. The temples have a dance and drama hall called, in Tamil inscriptions, *nāṭakaśālai*, and in Kerala, *kūṭambalam*, where to this day dramas are still performed. The prologues to the classical Sanskrit dramas mention either the temples and their festivals as the venue and occasions for their performance, or the theater halls in palaces. The temple of the goddess of learning, Sarasvatī (or Śārādā), is specially mentioned in the *Kāma Sūtra* and the *Bhāva-prakāśa* (*Treatise on Emotions*) as the place of performance. Therefore, side by side with the open areas, there were also protected places or buildings for the drama.

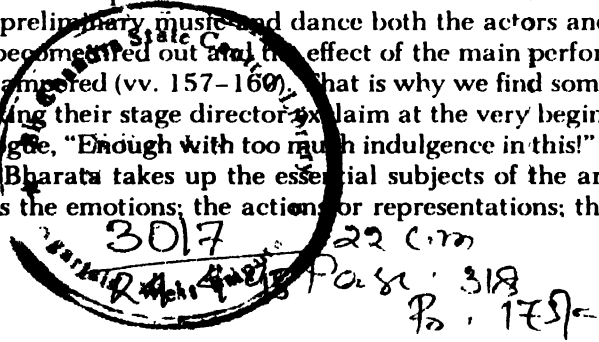
In the opening chapter of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* a story is told as to how a special theater hall came to be constructed. The first drama was given in the open during the festival of Indra's flag (*Indradhvaja*, *Dhvajamaha*), but the demons, or Asuras, disturbed the performance, being offended at the theme of the play which was the defeat of the Asuras by the gods. So, to provide protection for the performance, a theater (*nāṭyagrha*, *nāṭyamandapa*, *prekṣa-*

*grha*) came into being. In chapter 2, Bharata describes three types of theaters: the rectangular, the square, and the triangular.<sup>6</sup> Each of these may be of large, medium, or small dimensions according to requirements. Bharata recommends a middle size house, neither too large nor too small, in which the text, songs, and the like, could be well received, for minute facial expressions, or acting with the eyes, would become indistinct in too large a theater. The theater was made up of two primary parts, the stage and the auditorium. The stage proper was divided into three parts, the two-doored green room at the back (*nepathyagrha*), the stage head, which was an elevated portion (*raṅgaśīrṣa*), and the actual acting space down front (*raṅgapīṭha*). The portion for acting had two spaces on either side (*mattavāraṇi*) and was separated from the raised stage head by a curtain. Towards the end of chapter 34, Bharata says that the orchestra (*kutapa*) would sit in the space between the two entrances to the green room, facing the stage proper and the audience. The drums occupied the central place; the vocal singers faced the north; to their left were the string players, to their right, the flutists; a female singer sat opposite the male singer.

Moreover, the theater should be attractive, full of carvings in its woodwork, and have paintings on the walls. The hall should not be too open and windy as the voices of the actors and the music have to be protected against distortion; the whole building should be like a cave to provide the best acoustics. In Bharata's art the theater building is not a major matter of concern; in fact, in a list of topics which he gives in chapter 6 (v. 10), he puts the theater building last.

Before the drama proper, there were several preliminaries, religious propitiations (*raṅgapūjā* or *raṅgaīṣṭi*), a series of musical items and several dances, all of which come under the term *pūrvaraṅga*. (Part of all this survives in regional theater forms.) Bharata himself says, after devoting nearly three chapters to the preliminaries, that they can be simple as well as elaborate. If too much time is taken for the preliminary music and dance both the actors and spectators will become tired out and the effect of the main performance will be hampered (vv. 157-160). That is why we find some of the poets making their stage directors exclaim at the very beginning of the prologue, "Enough with too much indulgence in this!"

In chapter 6 Bharata takes up the essential subjects of the art which he lists as the emotions; the actions or representations; the



two-styles—natural and conventional or symbolic; the modes or tempos; the manners of the peoples to be imitated; other matters relating to performance; music—vocal and instrumental; and lastly, the theater. The primary place is naturally occupied by the human feelings (*bhāva*), major and minor, which the play and its action have to portray, and the *rasa*, or emotional rapport, which the spectators should realize thereby. The aesthetic doctrine of *rasa* requires that every element of production be governed by, and judged as appropriate or effective to the extent it is evocative of, this emotional appeal. "Nothing proceeds on the stage without reference to *rasa*," is Bharata's most important pronouncement. One point which both Bharata and his commentators emphasize must be noted, that is: Only when all the components of a drama, as produced on the stage, are presented, does this rapport or realization of *rasa* manifest itself in the spectator. Hence the realization of *rasa* in the text of a drama, which is merely read and not enacted, is of the second order (except where the reader is endowed with keen and active imagination and the poetry is sufficiently powerful and endowed with the required graphic and dramatic quality).<sup>7</sup> Similarly, when the required number of dramatic elements falls short by one, two, or more items, the *rasa* realization by the audience is also rendered difficult, indirect, or incomplete. Therefore, Abhinavagupta, writing in the eleventh century, equates only *nāṭya*, or a full drama, with *rasa*. His teacher, Tota, says that until a play is mounted on the stage, the text (*kārya*) alone does not engender *rasa*, and it is for this reason that the earlier and leading critic, Vāmana, can declare that drama is the greatest form of literature (*saṁdarbheṣu daśarūpakam śreyaḥ*).<sup>8</sup>

Bharata's treatment of sentiment, or *rasa*, and emotion, or *bhāva*, does not stop with their higher aesthetics only. As his text is also a practical guide to actors, Bharata describes, in chapters 6 and 7, the whole system whereby the actor should function in regard to them: the conditions which rouse the emotions; their physical effects, that is, actions of the various limbs of the body and parts of the face through which they should be portrayed by the actor; and the various minor feelings through which a major emotional state manifests itself, and which have to be expressed by the actor. For example, when a character in a play is in love, the sentiment of love (*rati*) is the basic and continuing emotional state (*sthāyibhāva*) portrayed by the actor. Its substrata (*ālambana*) are

the two lovers. Their feeling of love is augmented by such conditions as fine dress, ornaments, and perfume which relate to their own person, and by aspects of the surroundings or the natural environment where they stay or go to— the season, the garden or sea-side or moonlit night, or even music, drama and other performances that the two may attend. These are called excitants (*uddīpana*). The exchange of sweet glances, the play of the eyebrows, graceful movements, and pleasing conversation, are physical actions (*anubhāva* or *abhinaya*) through which the actor externalizes the character's inner feelings.

Love cannot be shown in abstract; it is developed and ramified through the portrayal of accessory or component feelings which rise and fall within the basic emotional state—longing, restlessness, reminiscence, bashfulness, hope, doubt, despondency, elation and joy, jealousy, cogitation, dejection, anger, and so on. These accessory feelings are called *samcāribhāva* or *vyabhi-cāribhāva*. The text of the play and the incidents and motifs devised by the playwright embody these feelings. The incidents, the dialogue, the scenes, in fact, the whole story or plot are of value or relevance only as embodiments or vehicles of these feelings and of the basic emotion. Bharata thus describes eight or nine major emotions<sup>9</sup> and thirty-three accessory feelings. The presentation on the stage of all the emotional factors mentioned above evokes in the responsive heart of the spectator the corresponding emotion imbedded therein which, through the course of the play, matures and effects a rapport. This is *rasa*. The various *rasa* serve also to distinguish different kinds of drama: the love play, heroic play, social play, farce, religious play, and others.

The concept in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is comprehensive, covering the whole range of acting possibilities, *abhinaya*. The word *abhinaya* means that which brings the thing to the spectator, or, the different ways in which the play, with its meaning and feelings, is brought by the actor to the spectator. *Abhinaya* may be given the restricted meaning of just the actor's physical actions or even still more narrowly, the gestures of the hands. But *abhinaya* in its fullest meaning encompasses four components. The first is makeup (*ahārya*), so called because it is external to the actor, to be put on and taken off. The other three are more intimate to the actor: the spoken word (*vācika*), which is what the poet has given in his play (if a song is sung, that too, would come under *vācika*), voluntary actions of the



various parts of the body (*āṅgika*), and involuntary reactions (*sāttvika*) that manifest themselves in the body when one is under emotional stress. We shall deal with each aspect of acting separately.

Bharata devotes chapter 19 to makeup (*āhārya*). The various characters in their diverse states, says Bharata at the outset, are best introduced by fixing their identities through makeup and this facilitates the further unfolding of the characters through the other aspects of acting technique. An actor, adds Bharata, has to give up or cover up his personal identity and become a new and different person. *Āhārya* encompasses not only the personal makeup of a character but also four related external techniques: the use of color, costume and ornament, masks, and properties. Bharata sets forth in detail the differences and details to be followed in facial complexion, hairstyle and dress according to a character's sex, age, country, religion, profession, and status, and whether he is a god, man, sage, or demon. Even in the same person, particular activities and emotional states, like separation or sorrow, will cause variance in dress and decor. Full realism is emphasized by Bharata in this respect. Ornaments, crowns, and armor must be of very light material so that actors are not hampered by their weight.

Under properties, Bharata describes mountains, vehicles, chariots, shields, armor, and banners. These all should be made of light material—fiber, split bamboo, hide, or wax. Animals, birds and reptiles are also constructed from similar light materials and used on stage. This raises an important question as to the use and the extent of use of scenery and properties in the ancient Indian theater. We have to collate Bharata's observations in different contexts to find out his stand on this matter. In chapter 19 he says, "There is no end to the things required in this world but it is not possible to bring them all, in their proper form, on the stage" (vv. 201-202). Realism is one thing and convention and symbolism of the stage are quite another. Furthermore, he says that even inanimate things, a mountain or a place, may be introduced in a *personified form* (v. 94). It is well known that in Sanskrit literature, poem or play, such personifications are most common. For example, the Himalayas appear as King Himavat and the city of Ayodhyā as a lady in Kālidāsa. The arms and weapons of Viṣṇu appear as persons in Bhāsa's plays. Turning to Abhinavagupta's *Abhinavabhāratī*, the commentary on the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, we find that vehicles or animals on which one rides are to be prepared in small models or

in drawings and carried in hand by characters such as charioteers (vol. 2, pp. 151-154). The text called *Nāṭyadarpaṇa* points out that in a play about King Udayana, where there is a hunt for an elephant, a replica of an elephant in light material is kept on the stage. Thus at least on occasion, rudimentary stage properties were used.

Another aspect of the conventions of Bharata's stage is the ideal apportionment of the stage space (called *kakṣyāvibhāga*) into garden, river, hermitage, forest, sea, mountain, house, palace, and so on. The drum in the orchestra between the two doors of the green room at the back is the central point from which such apportionment of the stage space is to be done. That point is to be taken as east and the other directions understood with reference to it. Those characters who are on the stage first furnish a reference point for those who enter later. This is the significance of the stage direction found in the text of the plays—*parikramya*, turning round, or moving to another point. The playwright's text at this point gives, in the spoken word of the actor, either before he moves or when he reaches the new point, or at both times, the indication, "I shall now go or enter such and such a place," and "this is such and such a place."

This automatically brings us to the text of the play, the work of the poet in which we find the next element of acting, the words (*vācika*). It is clear that the production and the text have an intimate relation. The absence of sets requires the text to give the audience, through the words of the poet, location and scenic background. We easily recall in Sanskrit plays we have read numerous descriptions of gardens, forests, hermitages, riversides, and mountains in the dialogue. The physical environment is not a mere object, but forms an integral part of the character and his state of feeling in the given context. For example, in Act III of *Śākuntala*, King Duṣyanta enters expressing his love for Śākuntalā and his longing to meet her again, "Surely during these hot hours she must be spending her time with her two friends in the cool bowers on the banks of the Mālinī river; I shall therefore go there." Then the poet's stage directions are, "He comes round, and shows by acting, the cool touch on his body" caused by the cool breeze from the river. He conveys this scenic background through his acting by lifting his arms, looking at the bristling hair there, inhaling the fine smell of the flowers, and showing a sense of refreshment. The same

acting technique can express the time of day (for which nowadays we resort to all sorts of lighting techniques). The location as affecting the character and as communicated in his spoken word affects the audience more than mere painted canvas and light. This also explains the purposiveness of dramatic poetry in a Sanskrit play and the way prose bursts into lyrical and descriptive verses.

The next patent feature concerning the text of a Sanskrit drama is its realistic use of literary Sanskrit and vernacular Prakrit dialects simultaneously. The higher characters speak Sanskrit; the lesser ones, women, higher as well as lower, speak the Prakrits. In *The Little Clay Cart* (*Mṛcchakatika*), where different kinds of lower characters figure, many different Prakrits are spoken. (In this connection, it may be noted the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is the earliest Indian treatise to discuss Prakrits [chap. 17].) This free use of Prakrit in Sanskrit drama is so prominent that a recent scholar who has worked out the comparative extent of the Prakrits used asks in one of his papers, How far is a Sanskrit play really Sanskrit? Be that as it may, the use of Prakrit in Sanskrit drama is a real pointer to its antiquity, as it refers to the age during which servants, and others who spoke Prakrit, easily followed the Sanskrit of higher characters with whom they directly conversed. The situation is only somewhat more pronounced than in a play in English in which, along with the standard idiom, colloquial and slang may also be used, according to the social status of the characters.

Prakrit, with its extensive vocalization of consonants, lent itself much more easily to melodic elaboration than Sanskrit and was therefore used as a medium of song (*dhruvā*) lyrics in a Sanskrit play. We shall discuss this more when we come to music on the ancient Indian stage, but one point must be stressed here: these *dhruvā*, or songs in Prakrit, were composed and added by the musicians of the theatrical troupe. In the postclassical period (after ca. A.D. 1000), a further noteworthy trend seems to have developed in which regional languages came to be used for *ad hoc* comic interludes introduced by the actors during a performance. These occurred, for example, at the end of major speeches or songs, and were for the diversion of the audience. We know of this practice from references in the *Bhāva-prakāśa* (*Treatise on Emotions*) of Śāradātanaya. The trend had grown in other parts of India; in Mithilā, Assam, and Nepal, dramas were written in Sanskrit, using the local language for the songs. But this reached a new high,

unique in more ways than one, in the Kūṭiyāṭṭam drama in Kerala where, for purposes of educating the audience which did not know Sanskrit, the jester (*vidūṣaka*) added regular running commentary in the regional language, Malayāḷam, to the text of the Sanskrit drama. Such digressions were made entertaining by the humor of the jester.

With reference to the text of the play as the product of a poet's effort, Bharata has a whole section of five chapters dealing with language, grammar, prosody and poetics. We shall pass over all this and take only Bharata's treatment of the text of the play as spoken by the actors. The text is called *pāṭhya* and Bharata discusses the important qualities of stage speech under the term *pāṭhyaguna*. There are, to begin with, three registers of the voice—low, middle, and high—corresponding to chest, throat, and head resonance which are used according to the nature of the character, the situation, and the feeling. The high vocal register is used when calling or addressing one at a distance. The middle and the lower registers are used for those within greater degrees of proximity. An utterance starting in a lower register may also wax louder. Next, the speaker should pay attention to the modulation (*rāga* literally, color): raised, lowered, a combination of the two, or shaking. Voice modulation is related to emotion. In a situation of love or laughter, raised and mixed are to be used; in heroism, terror, and wonder, raised and shaking; in pathos, fear, or disgust, it should be lowered, mixed, and shaking. Third, is intonation (*kāku*) according to the nature of the sentence. Sentences whose meaning is to be deduced from the context, and those that are straightforward, require different means of voice manipulation. Then there are six ornaments or embellishments (*alaṃkāra*) of the voice: loud, waxing (heated or excited), subdued, low, fast, and slow. Loud is to be used in fright. Waxing (heated or excited) is to be used in objecting, quarreling, disputation, anger, imprecation, assaulting, displaying prowess, pride, severity, harshness, repudiation, and crying. Subdued, articulated from the chest, is used in situations of despondency, fatigue, anxiety, longing, meekness, illness, playing together, in a wounded state, intoxication, secrecy or in confidence, and so on. Low is used in natural speaking, for illness, quietude, strain, fear, or fainting. Fast, to be uttered from the throat, is used in jest or playing with children, and for remonstrance, fear, fever, fright, exhaustion, or reporting urgent matters. Slow is appropri-

ate for love, pathos, cogitation, intolerance, jealousy, speaking of something which is not clear, bashfulness, mental preoccupation, distress, surprise, finding fault with others, or suffering under long illness.

Six other points are also to be observed in speaking. They are pause or stop (*viccheda*); an attractive and swaying delivery which seems to fill the whole stage and is called *arpaṇa* (literally, offering or giving oneself out); gradual release from the above, leading to a finale (*visarga*); continuity (*anubandha*); rising gradually and smoothly without break, over three octaves (*dīpana*); and gliding down in the same fashion to a low key (*praśamana*). Bharata shows the application of these in respect to the different sentiments, or *rasa*, indicating that more than one of these will have to be used according to the needs of any given situation. A general rule is: The voice should not suddenly jump from the lower register to the top register or vice versa.

Then Bharata mentions three times, or kinds of tempo: medium, in love and laughter; slow, in pathos; and fast, in heroism, wonder, fear, terror, and disgust. When handling a verse, the actor on the stage uses a pause (*virāma*) according to the line's meaning, not according to prosodical rules. For example, on the stage, the speaker may have to pause at the end of even a single syllable, or two, three or four syllables. Sometimes, in situations where, as in the illustrative verse given by Bharata, an offended lady is brushing aside the approaches of an erring lover through mime and gestures, the words uttered are to be as few as possible (17.132). A pause may, according to the situation, be of one to six *kalā* (a *kalā* being approximately one second); it should not exceed the limit of six *kalā*, except in cases where special situations, like illness or a swoon, require longer pauses.

Next, Bharata takes up the story or plot of the play. This is best examined as it occurs in the two full, or perfect, types of Sanskrit drama, the heroic *nāṭaka* and social *prakaraṇa*. The plot may be derived from old sources, like the epics or narratives, or from history. It may also be invented. Even if the plot is taken from a myth, the poet is free to be innovative. The best example of this is Kālidāsa's reworking of *Śākuntala* and *Vikramorvaśīya*, the former from the *Mahābhārata* and the latter from the *Vedas*, epics, and *Purāṇas*. The poet may cut out some elements of the original story or traits of character or he may bring together separate incidents

and episodes. The purpose of this reshaping of the story and character by the playwright is to achieve a harmony of theme and character which will subserve the ultimate purpose of Sanskrit drama—namely, the production of a harmonious emotional impression expressed by the concept of *rasa*. This will be clearer as we take up two important techniques of plot construction according to the ideals of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*; those incidents that are to be deliberately selected and those that are to be avoided, or relegated to the background (chap. 19).

Unity of action is the basis of unity of *rasa*. Every action has a beginning, middle, and end. Everyone embarks on an activity with a specific object (*kārya*) in view. The beginning is the seed (*bīja*) that is sown and the same appears in the end as the object or fruit (*phala*) achieved. There has to be an identity between these two. Between the seed and the end are three interlying stages in which the hero makes efforts to realize his objective, and in his pursuit of diverse ways of achieving this, the seed may get involved in several issues and though sometimes visible and sometimes out of sight, is always present as the basic goal in the mind of the hero. In the stage of effort (*yatna*), there is continuity (*bindu*). The objective may be beset with obstacles and complications but cannot be lost sight of. Following this occur helpful developments, major and minor episodes (*pataka* and *prakari*) in which the hero receives assistance from others, bringing on first the stage of hope and then certainty of success (*prāptyāśā* and *niyatāpti*). This course of development conjoins with the unfolding of the action of the play, which is identified as five junctures (*sandhi*): the opening, the progression, the development, the pause, and the conclusion. This, then, is the logic of the structure of plot in Sanskrit drama. Parts of an old story or events from history not helpful to this carefully conceived scheme—and incongruous character traits of the hero as well—must be left out. Incidents or motifs that repeat the same point and do not push forward the goal of attainment of the hero's objective are therefore excessive and not to be accepted. The playwright necessarily must exercise great selectivity in constructing his plot.

It is clear that the very structure of a Sanskrit drama precludes a miscarriage of purpose and consequent frustration of the hero's desires. A tragic denouement is therefore impossible in the very philosophy of the drama, not to mention the philosophy of Hindu-

ism of which the Sanskrit drama is a product. The final juncture of the play, in which the hero attains the fruit (*phalagama*) of his desires, is also attended by a converging of a number of favorable events complementary to the main purpose—things that were in puzzling obscurity are revealed in their true identities. A wonderful unfolding occurs that lends further color and appeal to the play. Then the final benediction is sung. The sentiment of wonder thus plays a role in the denouement.

From the point of view of enacting onstage the play as worked out above, Bharata makes a twofold division between story elements that are to be shown through physical action and those which are to be orally communicated. Battles and fights, death, sieges, and the like are not to be directly enacted or actually shown on the stage (18.38). These happenings, which cannot be managed on the stage or are not really interesting if they are, are to be reported or revealed in the conversation of lesser characters in interludes (short scenes introductory to a main act). Therefore, the playwright has to divide the story material into that fit for seeing and that which is only to be heard about; into that which has to go into the main acts and that which has to go into the interludes.

The Sanskrit dramatist is always interested in the effect of events on his characters, rather than in the actual incidents themselves. Even in the interludes, he shows this preference by making maidservants and others in a household exchange their reactions to important developments that are occurring. In the main act, his definite preference is for the effect of a momentous happening on the leading characters, rather than for those happenings themselves. A telling example is in Bhāsa's *The Visitor of Vāsavadattā*. The conflagration in Udayana's hunting camp at Lāvāṇaka village, in which it is rumored the queen, Vāsavadattā, perished, is the event with which the story begins. A modern playwright or scenarist for a film might open with the spectacle of the burning camp. Bhāsa, however, starts his play after the fire has taken place, and shows its consequences, particularly on the queen herself. Her emotional reactions to the event are rendered even more poignant when a student from the destroyed village is introduced and the queen is made to hear not only the story of her own death, but the way her beloved king rolled in the ashes and wept (this latter having the specific dramatic purpose of demonstrating the continuing love of Udayana for Vāsavadattā). This artistic approach can be

appreciated also in Kālidāsa, when he devotes an act, not, as a lesser or modern playwright might do, to depicting the repudiated Śakuntalā's suffering, but rather to dramatizing the king's deep remorse, his grief, and his transformation, in all of which the luminous image of Śakuntalā shines. For Bharata, it is the transmission of the feelings of those who have been affected by events that truly affect the spectator, not the spectacle of the fire and the killing of people onstage.

There is clearly a principle of refinement operating in this kind of avoidance of certain actions. Mere routine happenings or doings that cannot be seen by a mixed audience of men and women, especially maidens, are also to be avoided. On stage one should not go to bed, bathe, undress, put on makeup, be naked, kiss, or indulge in other kinds of sexual acts (24.285-289, Kāśī ed.; 22.295-299, G.O.S. ed.). The *Bhāṇavaprakāśa* puts the ideals of the Sanskrit stage admirably when it states (p. 214), "Of all the incidents of the story, a twofold division is to be done; some could only be indicated and some could be seen or heard. A mere long course of events devoid of emotional relevance or that which is inappropriate is to be merely hinted at. What is to be actually shown and seen is that which is full of emotions, and is dignified and enjoyable."

We have to deal now with acting through physical action, which, in essence, is the drama. In the world, we do not always accompany what we say with its appropriate physical action; if one does so, one excites laughter or is said to be theatrical. There are, of course, voluntary and unavoidable movements or facial expressions, but it is in drama that, in addition to speaking, you also act. Therefore, Bharata says that the very idea of drama is nonnatural; on the stage, you extend yourself, and with the various parts of your body, you enact and present an idea through such actions to the onlooker (14.78, 80; 21.123, 125, Kāśī ed.). While this is so in all drama, Sanskrit drama has developed the use of the body in acting over the whole range of the spoken word, so as to underline it, reinforce it, interpret and enrich it, with appropriate movements of the torso and legs, expressions of parts of the face, and with a parallel language of gestures of the hands. It is this, along with music, which added one more dimension, that made Sanskrit drama really a form of dance drama.

Already I have presented evidence that shows a whole play was interpreted through this form of acting, or *abhinaya*. The *Kuṭṭant-*



*mata* has been cited with its detailed description of the production of Act I of the play *Ratnāvali* and the elaborate way in which the verses in that play were interpreted by *abhinaya*. From the texts of the dramas themselves, particularly of Kālidāsa, we can also see this. We have noted that no stage properties were used. What would then be the method of enacting a scene like the opening of *Śakuntala* in which we see Duṣyanta speeding in a chariot with galloping horses? We may see Kālidāsa's stage direction, "acts out the speed of the chariot (*ratha-vegam nirūpya*)," for the charioteer. The charioteer represents by the *abhinaya* of the hand the speeding of the chariot. This is done with the hands in a *kaṭakāmukha* position, which, together with the legs in a riding position and the motions of the hands, shows the act of riding and holding the reins of the horses.<sup>10</sup> Then, when the king tells the charioteer "Look at the deer now being shot down dead," the poet adds the stage direction, "acts out putting an arrow to his bowstring (*iti śarasandhānam nāṭayati*)." Thus the king acts out the shooting. This is done with the left hand in the *muṣṭi* pose, holding the bow, and the *kaṭakāmukha* on the right hand, drawing the bowstring. As one goes riding in a chariot, he is also to show, with appropriate bodily movements, the pose of sitting and the shaking of the limbs caused by the jolts on uneven ground.

Another example is in Act I of the *Vikramorvaśīya* (*Ūrvaśī Gained Through Valor*), when Purūravas asks that the chariot slowly descend the mountain slopes. As it does, the poet adds the stage direction "Ūrvaśī shows the action of the body being shaken, caused by the descent of the chariot (*rathāvatārakṣobham nāṭayanti*)." In the last act of *Śakuntala*, when Duṣyanta and the divine charioteer get down from the chariot, we read Kālidāsa's stage direction, "the two get down by *abhinaya* (*nāṭyena avatīrṇau*)." Coming back to the first act of the play, when Śakuntalā and her two friends water the trees and creepers, there is no pot or water, but only the appropriate slant of their bodies at the hip to show the water-filled pots being carried by them. Their bent hands mime the holding of the pots round their necks. The pouring of water is shown by the required bend of the body and the pose of the palms letting the water flow down. This is the meaning of the stage direction, "she acts out watering the tree (*iti vṛkṣasecanam rūpayati*)," given here. Later, when the bee harasses Śakuntalā, she enacts being chased by a nonexistent bee (*bhramara-bādhām rūpayati*). ★

Act IV opens, Kālidāsa says in the stage direction, "Then enter the two friends representing by *abhinaya* the picking of flowers (*kusumāvacaṃ nāṭayantyau*)," and again a little later, "she acts out gathering flowers (*iti puṣpoccaṃ rūpayati*)." There are no flowering plants or creepers about. The friends approach supposed plants, giving that impression by looking up and admiring their flowers, then pluck them with the *saṃdamaṣa* pose of the right hand and put them on the left palm in the *pataka* pose which represents a receptacle. In the beginning of Act VI, two maids in the palace pluck new mango blossoms and offer them to the god of love; here the stage direction is, "*kapotakaṃ kṛtvā*," that is, the hand gesture in which the two palms have been cupped and brought together, so as to resemble the body of a dove, showing that inside they carry something. This *kapota* pose of the hand stands for a handful of flowers.

One more stage direction in the *Vikramorvaṣṭya* can be mentioned. At the end of Act I, when the three heavenly damsels, Ūrvaśī and her two friends, take leave of the king to return to heaven through their divine power, the stage direction reads, "they represent jumping into the sky by *abhinaya*" (*ākāśotpatanaṃ rūpayanti*). This is done by the joint action of hands and feet in the forty-seventh *karāṇa* body pose, called *vṛścika*, in which the left leg is planted and the right leg is thrown back and bent so as to resemble the uplifted tail of the scorpion and the arms bent at elbow and held upwards. In fact, the 108 *karāṇa* described by Bharata in chapter 4 and reproduced in sculpture in some South Indian temples, have, in addition to their forming part of pure dance, their use in dramatic situations, as pointed out by Abhinavagupta and his followers.<sup>11</sup> The last evidence coming from the texts themselves is that of the aside (*janāntikam*), in which one speaks to someone on the stage, but leaves others out of hearing. This aside is to be spoken with the actor placing his hand in the *tripataka* pose in the direction of those to be avoided and turning his face in the opposite direction toward those who are to hear his words.

This whole field of *abhinaya* of bodily movement is called *aṅgika* by Bharata (chaps. 8-9) and it is divided into three primary types: of the limbs (*śāstrā*), of the face (*mukhaṇa*), and the movements of the whole body (*ceṣṭā*). The head, hands, chest, sides, hips and feet are the six parts (*aṅga*) of the body. Later texts speak of the six others—neck, arms, back, abdomen, thighs, shanks

—as a further class, called *pratyāṅga*. Both of these are “limbs,” or *śarīra*. The parts of the face (*upāṅga*) are the eyebrows, nostrils, lips, cheeks, and chin. Actions involving the whole body, as in standing, sitting in different poses, or walking, are *ceṣṭā*. When the limbs are moved the action grows like the branches of a tree, one leading to another, and hence is called metaphorically, “branch” (*śakha*). The action of parts of the face is called, following the same imagery, “sprout” (*aṅkura*), when, with the spoken words imbedded within oneself like seeds, the actions show themselves above as sprouts on different parts of the face. Sometimes action precedes the word and indicates or paves the way for the coming words; in this case, the facial expression is called advance indication (*sūcā*) (chap. 22).

Eighteen kinds of head action and their applications are given. There are eight kinds of eye movement corresponding to the same number of permanent emotions (*sthayibhāva*), an equal number corresponding to the various *rasa*, and others for the thirty-three or thirty-six transitory emotions (*samcāribhāva*). The actions of the eye go with others of the pupil of the eye, the eyelids, and the brows. Over and above the specific movements of the eye and its related parts, and a similar number of specific movements each for the nose, cheeks, lips and chin, the overall emotional state expressed through the face (*mukharāga*) may be: natural or neutral, clear or pleasing, passionate or flushed, or dismal. These are very important, and it is the appropriate overall facial appearance which is the base for specific movements of the various parts of the face. There are twenty-four single hand poses and thirteen double hand poses, known as *hastā*. Each has a large number of uses, and while in use, each hand in a pose has to be shown differently to indicate different meanings. This is accomplished by changing their position or level and attendant action. These hand poses have increased in number since Bharata and regional texts have added their own special hand poses. For any object, a hand gesture could be devised on the basis of the form of the object, its characteristic activity, or mark, or class. But there are some cautions that an actor should observe: as in life, characters of high status should not indulge in too much gesticulation; middle status characters should gesture moderately; and only lower class characters gesticulate profusely (9.173). Secondly, certain situations are acted best with little hand movement—sorrow, swooning, bashfulness, fatigue,

stupefaction, motionlessness, dullness, illness, absorption in thought, and penance. Intimate, subtle physical reactions (*sāttvikābhinaya*) are to be employed then, rather than explicit gestures with the hands (9.176–179).

The body per se is the medium of movement in acting. Therefore, the analysis of the action of different limbs, which Bharata does, is the only way of studying the role of the bodily action. As has been observed in contemporary acting theory in the West:

The purpose of dividing the body into individual units is twofold: to discover, out of the total number of things the body can communicate by movement what kind of pantomimic action each can best project and, by capitalizing on this knowledge, to increase by practice the expressiveness of each part. . . . The human body is singularly susceptible to division . . . the units are legs and feet, arms and hands, head and face, and torso and shoulders. . . . The most utilitarian of all divisions of the body, the arms and hands have many functions and serve many purposes.<sup>12</sup>

The hand gesture is the gesture of gestures; the hand is the indicator of the body. The adage often quoted in Indian dance is, "Where the hand moves, there the eye follows" (*yato hastah tato dr̥ṣṭiḥ*).

In the movements of the legs and feet, there are those of the feet planted on the ground, and of the feet raised above and involving an aerial movement (*cārī*), stances (*sthānaka*), actions of the legs (*maṇḍala*), and ways of walking on the stage (*gati*). The last especially may be noted (chap. 12). The gait or style of walking should be in accord with the level and status of the character: firm, medium, and fast, corresponding to high, middle, and low characters. But in all cases, the gait will be governed by the context and the emotional condition. The gait with which an actor enters reveals him, his character, and state of feeling; indeed, his whole being.

The tempo of a movement (*laya*) is then given by Bharata for several situations. The gait, in particular, should be integrated with the rhythm of background instrumental music. In Bhavabhūti's play on the love of Mālati and Mādhava (*Mālaticāhava*), the lovelorn hero, Mādhava, enters with a languid gait described by the onlooker Makaranda as *gamanam alasam* (1.20) and in explaining this, the commentator Jagaddhara, who is also a writer on music, dance, and drama, says that Mādhava's entry is in *dvi-*

*padtlāya* tempo, a slow measure composed of long *mātrā*, suited to situations like the present one. One of the versions of Act IV of the *•Vikramorvaśya*, which has come down in manuscript with its musical score,<sup>13</sup> mentions the tempos of the hero's movements in his different actions in this scene.

Next, Bharata takes a series of situations—going to a secret tryst, entering after a battle, treading through a repelling or fearful scene, in cold, in darkness and so on—the various sentiments, and diverse characters—heroes, cowards, merchants, ministers, mendicants, drunkards, the grief stricken, the lame and a dozen others—and gives a whole set of composite actions and gaits for them. For example, cold is to be acted by clasping the limbs, shaking, folding the hands at the chest, crouching, and making the teeth chatter (12.68–69). A character groping in the dark should stretch out his arms and move his feet slowly with soles scraping the ground (12.87). The actor should show he is climbing to a high place, a mansion or hill, or coming down to the level ground by raising his feet and pulling his body along. To cross water, he should draw up his clothing.

Complete schemes of *abhinaya* for a host of situations are given again later (chaps. 22, 25). The variety and range of situations and objects covered by Bharata is at least suggested by the following examples: objects of the five senses—sound, touch, sight, taste, and smell—with their variations of good and bad, the desirable and the undesirable; the parts of the body; heat of the sun, rain, thunder, and animals; the six seasons; receiving different kinds of persons; mountains, trees, the sea; enjoying a swing; old age, illness, and excitement.

Bharata's treatment of physical action (*āṅgikābhinaya*), in all its aspects, is the longest in his work, taking eight chapters. As stated earlier, action is drama, and hence this emphasis of Bharata's is natural. A similar concern with bodily movements is typical of much contemporary acting technique in the West, we may note in passing: "But to think of words as our main or only means of communication forgetting the broad and subtle expressiveness of movements is gross error. Pantomime . . . is the taproot from which all stage action grows and takes its strength."<sup>14</sup> That Bharata's system is quite within the realm of practicality and achievement and that every minute part of action could be perfected and every inch of the body trained, can be understood by anyone who

has seen Indian dance or who has observed at close quarters the long and arduous training undergone by actors of Kūṭiyāṭṭam and Kathakali dance dramas.

The fourth aspect of acting is *sāttvika*. This relates to the presentation of eight special, involuntary physical manifestations that occur when an emotion reaches a high point. *Sattva* means the mental capacity of the actor to identify himself with the character and his feelings. Relying upon such identification alone the actor can show the emotional reactions of perspiration, hairs standing on end, limbs becoming benumbed, the voice breaking or faltering, trembling, pallor, tears, and immobility. One who is not truly, or deeply, in sorrow cannot shed tears; one who does not feel excitement or fear does not perspire. It is because of this special quality of these eight manifestations that they are separately dealt with. In chapter 7, where they are described along with the emotions, Bharata gives the circumstances under which each rises and the way to act them. Later, when describing actions of the limbs, he says, as we have noted, that in situations of deep emotion, gestures of hands and other movements naturally subside and the appropriate type of representation is through the eight *sāttvika* (9.173-178).

Music is a topic to which Bharata gives detailed attention. It is a difficult and abstract subject to treat and will be discussed here but briefly. First, we must consider the songs, or *dhruvā*, previously mentioned in connection with the general absence of stage properties in production. Stage directions in a Sanskrit drama are brief. But a precise picture of a character, his appearance, and emotional condition, is given in the dialogue of another who sees him. It is Bharata's dictum that no character not already described by somebody's words can enter. For example, Makaranda describes Madhava's entry in Act I of *Mālatīmādhava*, and King Duṣyanta describes Śakuntalā when she enters in the concluding act of *Śakuntala*. Using these descriptions as their starting point, musicians who were part of the theater troupe were to compose appropriate songs in Prakrit language. They were to be in diverse meters and were to use symbolic imagery. Gods, kings, sages and Brahmins should be described in the imagery of the sun, moon, and fire; demons in terms of clouds, mountains, lions, and elephants; semidivine beings as stars; and women as a ray of light, a swan, a cuckoo, a peacock, or other birds. In Act IV of the *Vikramorvaśya*, the two friends, Sahajanyā and Citralekhā, are separated

from the heroine Ūrvaśī and consequently feel anxious. Longing and sorrow are thus introduced in a song: "Here on this lake, this pair of friendly *female swans* overcome with the sorrow of their separation from their friend, eyes tumbling with tears, is in suffering." The hero, Purūravas, love mad, is introduced in the song of his entry: "The great leader of the herd of elephants, exhibiting symptoms of madness caused by separation from its beloved female, and with body covered with heaps of leaves and flowers from trees, is entering the thicket of the forest."

Although Prakrit was the normal medium of such songs, the text of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* says that Sanskrit may be used for songs for sages, or gods (32.384). And there are a few examples of Sanskrit songs in existing play texts, although they are exceptions.

Before we go to the melodic and rhythmic aspects of theater songs, it will be helpful to note the kinds and occasions of their use. There are five types: one for the entry of a character (*prāveśikā*), and one for the exit of the character (*naiṣkrāmikā*). In between, there can be a song that reinforces and develops mood (*prāsādikā*), one that brings on a change in the situation or feeling (*akṣepikā*), and one that has the function of filling a hiatus in the performance caused by extraneous circumstances, such as a mishap to the actor (*āntarā*). Except for the last, the songs are integrally connected with theme, character, and mood.<sup>15</sup>

Although normally characters are to be ushered on with their entrance songs, there are exceptional entries which do not require them—cases of commotion, wonder, a character who has to enter singing as part of the story, or one that has to enter weeping. From the point of view of suitability to the emotions, there are several points on which songs differ. Short-syllable songs in short meters are suitable to indicate a change in situation or mood. A combination of long and short syllables suits the fourth and fifth type of song. The long-drawn-out song is appropriate when a character is made captive, is besieged, falls, becomes ill, swoons, or succumbs. An even longer and more drawn out song suits longing, anxiety, fatigue, or dejection. A short-syllabled and faster song should be employed when a character is seeing a natural calamity, wonderful things, spirits, or is in jubilation, terror, or fear. Bharata concludes that all songs should be chosen with an eye to theme, place, time, season, nature of the character, and mood of the scene.

Since the song has thematic value, the words should be heard clearly. Therefore, instruments, particularly the drum, should be

gin accompanying the song only after the text of the song has first been sung through by itself. It could then be repeated with musical accompaniment. The songs were sung by the musicians in the orchestra, by men as well as by women, but not by the actors acting the roles. Bharata gives details of the time measures governing the rhythms of the songs in chapter 31 and the proper musical instrumentation in chapter 29.

More important than the theatrical songs is the instrumental ensemble (*kutapa* or *br̥nda*) which was essential to heighten the effect of the drama. Instruments included flutes (*suśira*), strings (*tata*), drums (*avanaddha*), and bronze cymbals and bells (*ghana*). The music ensemble could be small, medium, or large, ranging from five singers, two flutes, and three drums to twelve male and twelve female voices, twenty-six flutes, and nine drums. As we have seen in connection with gait, musical instruments played an important part in underlining the different styles of walking of the characters. Bharata gives the rhythmic syllables for the instrumentation which is suitable to the gaits of the four types of heroes, for other varieties of characters, divine, human and demoniac, and for different situations and emotions (33.211–219, Kāśī ed.).

The melodic aspect of this music deserves some attention. *Jāti*, the parent modes or scales from which the *rāga* later developed, provided the melodic settings for both songs and instrumental music. Intervals (*śruti*), notes (*svara*), and modes (*jāti*) suited to different *rasa* and situations are mentioned by Bharata. Later commentators worked out correlations between *rāga*, *rasa*, and dramatic context. Certain *rāga* are well known in Indian music history for their use in drama to suggest certain feelings. The convention still reigning in North Indian music that certain *rāga* are to be sung only at certain times of the day is a carry-over from the ancient Sanskrit stage. The scales to be used in the different junctures of the drama (the five *sandhi*) were known to Kālidāsa, who says in his poem *Kumārasambhava*, that after their wedding, Śiva and Parvati witnessed a dramatic performance by the celestial damsels with a love theme and marked by *rāga* suited to different *rasa* (7.91).

Twice Bharata says that what has not been said in the words of the play is to be embellished through music. What he seems to mean is that actions—such as gathering flowers, or watering plants, or drawing a picture—which are only mentioned in the



text, should have musical accompaniment throughout. There is to be no gap; song, instrument, word, action should flow in one unbroken sequence, says Bharata (28.7). There is a saying in Sanskrit: Anything strange is like "a drama without a drum" (*amṛdaṅgam nāṭakam*). The drum (*bhāṇḍa*) is the very spirit of the drama. Music, says Bharata, forms the bed (*śayya*), that is, the bedrock, of drama (32.436). "The songs (*dhruva*) based on *rasa* and context, make the drama dazzle as the heaven with the stars. As without color, a drawing is not beautiful, so is drama not attractive without music" (32.425). "What is production (*prayoga*)?" asks Bharata. He answers, "It is the union of song, instrument and action" (32.378, C.O.S. ed.).

Further, the type of play is related to its form of production. Bharata names ten major forms of drama (*daśarūpa*), and one important derivative type (*nāṭikā*). These fall into a broad twofold division, the graceful and delicate (*sukumāra*, *lalita*, *maṣṛṇa*) and the forceful and the violent (*uddhata* or *aviddha*). Those which present themes of love, with some heroism and humor, belong to the former; those in which gods and demons fight belong to the latter. Although owing to perfect training in acting (*abhinaya*), men could play women's roles and vice versa, and as already noted, there were troupes of actresses only, and, as seen in the traditional theater, there were wholly male troupes as well, Bharata says that normally women should not be asked to perform in forceful and violent plays (35.30-36, Kāśī ed.). The delicate type of play requires an atmosphere of grace, and motifs should be pleasing; the forceful and the violent plays require an atmosphere, themes, and actions embodying those qualities. The atmosphere or style (*vṛtti*) is graceful (*kaiśikī vṛtti*), or forceful (*arabhaṭī vṛtti*).<sup>10</sup> Women and love form an essential feature of the former, and men and battle of the latter.

Of the several forms of play which Bharata discusses, the two which are the fullest and most perfect types, the heroic play (*nāṭaka*) and the social play (*prakaraṇa*), belong to the first or graceful category. (The *nāṭikā* is derived from these two and melds their characteristics.) These are the play types which shine in production through their elaborate use of music and dance. It is they that best exemplify the idealistic and conventional elements of production. Others, like the farce in one or two acts (*prahasana*) and the amorous monologue (*bhāṇa*), both of which present lower

characters or characters in unseemly activities, are realistic in milieu. Bharata distinguishes between the style of performance which relies upon conventions, idealism, and symbolism—calling it *nāṭyadharmī*—and the style of production which emphasizes realism, *lokadharmī*.<sup>17</sup> It is in the conventional style that the production techniques of music and dance described so far are most suitable. Bharata considers this style, overall, the most artistic and praiseworthy. If a play is of the forceful type, then a realistic style of production, not using conventional methods and materials, is to be adopted; such a realistic production is inferior, but Bharata allows it (13.71–77).

Among the shorter, one act forms, the *bhāṇa*, or monologue, requires a special kind of production. There is only one actor and he carries the entire play by himself. A variety of characters are part of the play but they exist off stage. The speaking character accosts them, carries on an imaginary dialogue with them, acts as if he hears their words, reproduces their words, and replies to them. This technique is called speaking in the air (*ākāśabhāṣita*). The actor adopts a variety of voices and must therefore be highly resourceful. Similarly, the other short form called *vithī* seems to have been a dialogue with two participants, the material presented being based entirely on words, and with the two speakers trying to excel in outwitting each other.

In a conventional (*nāṭyadharmī*) production, replete with music, dance, and *abhinaya*, naturally the text is enlarged and embellished, so that the complete production of the play lasts a long time. The tradition of Kūṭiyāṭṭam, the dramatic form of the state of Kerala, tells us that one act alone is done on one night. Kūṭiyāṭṭam theater maintains, to this day, the tradition of staging Sanskrit dramas. The tradition probably dates from the tenth century A.D. There are local accretions and deviations but essentially the Kūṭiyāṭṭam technique goes back to Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The Cola inscriptions in Tamil country, dating also from the tenth century A.D., are very informative on the arts of dance and drama. From these inscriptions we know that the seven acts of a Sanskrit drama were played over seven days. In some of the ancient plays, like *The Little Clay Cart* and the *Mālatīmādhava*, as also in some of the lost masterpieces, separate names have come down for each act, a phenomenon also found in Kūṭiyāṭṭam tradition. This is further evidence that in this kind of production of Sanskrit plays, only one act was performed on one day or night.

The Sanskrit theater was growing. Writers and artists went on experimenting and developing new forms. Some play forms popular among the folk were taken, refined, refashioned, and fitted into the classical technique and framework. At one stage these were codified into a class called *uparūpaka*, or secondary play forms. The chief characteristic of their production was the prominence given to music and dance. In most cases their stories were composed as songs and they featured only one actress or dancer. Thus they are to be considered more as dances than as dramas.<sup>18</sup>

A chapter which gives a lively picture of the Sanskrit theater is the penultimate one in which Bharata deals with the dramatic troupe, the selection of artists, the assignment of roles, and the members of the technical staff. First he speaks of the troupe manager or stage manager (*sūtradhāra*) whose knowledge must cover every aspect of drama and theater, and his assistant (*pāripārśvaka*) who must be equally versatile. The leading actress must be an expert in music and drama, in addition to other subjects. The hero is called *nāyaka*, because he leads and takes the performance to a successful completion with his all-round ability. An actor is called *naṭa*; the word *naṭ* refers to dance and representation of the activities of the world through actions and their accompanying emotions. Actors whose features match the roles are chosen to play dwarfs and odd-looking persons. Lean, poorly dressed, and unprepossessing actors should play servants, a humorous person a comic part, and so on. High, middle, or low, whatever kind of character or age, the actor chosen should correspond by nature to that class and age group. The actor should have the capacity to identify himself with the character he has to portray (35.14, Jasu ed.). If the actor is the king, so he becomes. While it is best when by age and appearance an actor is in accord with the nature of the character he is to play, the polished portrayal of emotions comes only through maturity and diligent training. The conductor of the orchestra (*taurika*) should have knowledge of all aspects of music. Then there is the team of stage technicians including artisans, painters, designers, makeup men, tailors, jewelers, garland makers, laundrymen, and players of diverse musical instruments (*kuṣṭlava*).

Finally, Bharata gives us a graphic picture of a living theater in his chapter 27 on success in performance (*siddhi*). In the opening sentence, he says it is for success that a performance is given. When a performance succeeds, the performers draw from the audience appreciation and admiration ranging from smiles and

laughter to exclamations of "wonderful," "well done," and "how sad." Spectators register their appreciation physically by shivering with joy, rising from their seats spontaneously, and by offering presents to the performers. The spectator moves with the actor and becomes one with him, whether it is joy or sorrow that is being depicted. He who can become dejected when the actor shows dejection, is happy when the actor shows happiness, is sorrowful when sorrow is depicted, he indeed is the ideal spectator (27.42). It is from this observation of Bharata that the concept of *sahṛdaya* developed—the spectator of a drama being a person of "one heart" with the playwright and his character.

There were dramatic contests at which prizes were awarded by judges (*prāśnika*). Bharata lists a number of points on which the judges were to award plus or minus marks in reaching their decision. Lapses in performance of many kinds were to be marked down as faults or vulnerable points (*ghāta*). Lack of concentration, speaking the words of another character, inappropriateness to the role, lapses of memory, and falling out of character were failures on the part of the actor. Scenery falling, faults in the spoken word, grammatical and other language errors, mistakes of delivery, flaws in the music, improper qualities of voice, lack of imagination and resourcefulness, and defective makeup were other faults to be noted. Bharata says it should be reckoned a fault if the playwright or producer introduces into the play portions of a different play. The dramatic composition chosen must be in clear and simple language that can be followed by an audience composed of all classes of people; the drama is no place for a show of pedantry. Variety is the essence of the world and as much as possible, dramatists and performers should try to satisfy all expectations. However, tastes of spectators differ and every type of play cannot appeal to every type of spectator. For this reason too, the panel of judges should represent all arts and branches of knowledge and skills comprehended in theater. They should be free from prejudice and partiality. Judgment of a play's success should arise from those who sympathetically respond to a particular type of play or to particular parts or aspects of a play.

In judging a play, the following points of merit are to be taken into account: all-round effect; harmony and proportion of the several components of the performance; sweetness or appeal of physical action; delivery of speech; appropriateness of the actors to

their roles and acting according to the nature of the character; and, last and highest, *rasa*, or the effective portrayal of emotions. Excellence depends on these factors.

An important question is, when and where were performances given? From the *Kāma Sūtra* and from prologues to a number of plays we know that plays were produced in mornings and afternoons, as well as evenings. Bharata correlates types of plays with time of performance. Plays pleasing to hear and see, based on virtue and having religious significance, may be presented in the forenoon. Those rich in instrumental music and providing scope for involuntary emotional expression may be done in the afternoon. Plays emphasizing love, heroines, music, dance, and gaiety are to be staged in the evening. Performance should be avoided at midnight, midday, and times for worship and eating. The time and place are factors to be taken into account and the *rasa* of the play should also match the hour of the day. Command performances for kings, however, may be held at any time.

The king, of course, was the patron par excellence of the theater. Almost equally important was the temple whose frequent festivals were occasions for performance. In the latter case, a large audience, both local people and visitors was always assured. Inscriptions, as well as surviving practices in Kerala, give evidence that temples were leading sites of performances. The drama is an offering (*yajña*) to the gods, superior to the ordinary sacrificial offering, and pleasing to their eyes, says Bharata at the end of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Kālidāsa says this as well in *Mālavikāgnimitra* (1.4). "He who offers a dramatic performance makes a rare gift (*dāna*) and he, as well as the spectator, will attain heaven." So says Bharata in concluding his work:

*prekṣaṇīyapradānam hi sarvadāneṣu pūjyate  
labhate sadgatim puṇyām*

## Notes

1. See O. H. de Wijesekara, "Buddhist Evidence for the Early Existence of Drama," *Indian Historical Quarterly* 17:196-206.
2. See my articles on this play in the *Indian Historical Quarterly* 19 (March 1943):69-71; and 20 (December 1944):366.

3. The whole episode forms the theme of the thirteenth-century play *Pradyumnābhyaśaya* of King Ravivarman of Quilon in Kerala.
4. Āśvaghoṣa's *Buddhacarita* shows a good knowledge of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.
5. See my article, "Some Sanskrit Texts on Painting," *Indian Historical Quarterly* 9 (December 1933):898-911, 1041-1042.
6. See my series of articles, "Theatre-Architecture in Ancient India," *Triveni* 4 (November-December 1931):715-723; *Triveni* 5 (January-February 1933):358-362; *Triveni* 6 (July-August 1933):45-59. See also "Hindu Theatre," *Indian Historical Quarterly* 9 (December 1933):991-994.
7. See the discussion in chap. 7, "*Kāvya* and *Nāṭya*" ("Poetry and Drama"), in my book *Bhoja's Śṛṅgāra Prakāśa* (Madras: Punarvasu, 1963).
8. *Kāvya-lamkāra Sūtra* 1.3.30, 31.
9. Love, heroism, laughter, wonder, pathos, fear, terror, and disgust. Later writers add quietude, affection, devotion, and others.
10. On *rathagati*, see Bharata's chapter 12 on gait (vv. 88-89.)
11. See "Introduction" to my edition of Jāya Senāpati's *Nṛtta-ratnāvali* (Madras: Government Oriental Mss. Library, 1964; 1968).
12. Jerry Blunt, *The Composite Art of Acting* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1966), pp. 379, 383.
13. See the Nirnaya Sagar Press edition (Bombay, 1925) with Ranganatha's commentary.
14. Blunt, *Composite Art of Acting*, pp. 48, 49.
15. For a detailed treatment of the subject of music and Sanskrit drama, see my paper "Music in Ancient Indian Drama," *Art & Letters* (London) 28, no. 1 (1954):10-18; *Journal of the Music Academy* (Madras) 25 (1954):79-92; *Sangeet Natak Akademi Bulletin* (New Delhi) no. 4 (March 1956):5-12.
16. On *vṛtti*, see my papers in the *Journal of Oriental Research* 6, no. 4 (October-December 1932):346-370; 7, no. 1 (January-March 1933):34-52; 7, no. 2 (April-June):91-112.
17. For more on the two *dharma*, see my two papers in the *Journal of Oriental Research* 7, no. 4 (October-December 1933):359-375; 8, no. 1 (January-March 1934):57-74.
18. For a detailed account of these forms of stage performances, see my paper "Uparūpakas and Nṛtṭyaprabandhas," *Sangeet Natak* 2 (April 1966):5-25; *Samskrita Ranga Annual* (Madras) 5 (1964-1967):31-54.

# Dance or Movement Techniques of Sanskrit Theater

*Kapila Vatsyayan*

THERE HAS BEEN of late, considerable discussion about the nature of Sanskrit theater, its essential ethos, content, form, and technique. Scholars have generally agreed to discard the point of view exemplified by Keith,<sup>1</sup> who regarded Sanskrit drama primarily as literature, to be read rather than to be performed. A body of critical literature has emerged during the last two decades which has conclusively proved that Sanskrit drama was primarily theater to be performed, not merely to be read. Through the pioneering efforts of V. Raghavan and others, primary textual material relating to aesthetic theories governing the creative efforts of the dramatists and the technical vocabulary used for this distinct form of theater have come to light.

Moreover, there is no longer a need to establish the fact that the traditions of the Sanskrit theater embodied a world view different and distinct from Greek or other Western drama, and that the fundamentals of its methods of selecting material, its organization and presentation in form and technique, were unique. Equally important is the recognition that the Indian arts developed within a framework in which they were mutually dependent and interconnected on the level of spirit, thought, content, form and technique.<sup>2</sup>

The structure of Sanskrit theater performance has to be seen and analyzed against the background of a world view contained in works of Indian speculative thought and the recognition of opposing and complementary principles of abstraction and concretiza-

tion, mutual interdependence of art forms, and the autonomy of each artistic medium. Behind all this is the principle of unity; formless, or "beyond form" (*parā-rūpa*), on the level of the spirit, and simultaneously encompassing the possibility of multiplicity of form, so eloquently and repeatedly expressed in the *Brāhmaṇas* and *Upaniṣads*, and incorporated in concrete artistic expressions, both creatively and critically.

The *Brāhmaṇas*, the *Āraṇyakas* and the *Upaniṣads* were all extensions of the speculative thought contained in the *Vedas*. From the *Ṛgveda* onward there is abundant evidence of the recognition of the general principle of the immortal soul (formless), which is manifested through a diversity of form. There is an equal insistence on using the metaphor of the body and the senses to explain cosmic phenomena and the macrocosm. The three key principles of this system of speculative thought are the "cosmic man" (*puruṣa*), the "self" (*ātman*) and the "supreme universal being" (*brahman*). These are elaborated in many ways, but consistently the imagery of the body and the senses is used. Scores of examples could be given to support this view. Here we can do no better than to quote a few passages from the *Āraṇyakas* and the *Upaniṣads* to understand the idea of the "one" and the "many," and the manifestation in diverse forms of the "unmanifest." The *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* calls the immortal soul and the universal principle "vital breath" (*prāṇa*), the sustainer. "He is a God who, though one, has entered into diverse forms of the body. It is he who is both death and immortality."<sup>3</sup> The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, the most important text of ritual, repeats the idea: "The Man is vital breath (*prāṇa* or *ātman*), for he leads forth all creatures. The senses are his own. When he sleeps, the senses are merged in him."<sup>4</sup> The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* voices the idea in yet another form. "The one controller, the inner self in all beings, who renders His one form manifold, to those wise men who see Him enshrined in their own soul, is everlasting bliss, not to others. The permanent is the impermanent, the sentient among the insentient, the one in the many who gives each his allotted fruit, to those who see Him residing within their own selves is everlasting peace, not to others."<sup>5</sup>

These ideas permeate discussions in all treatises of early Indian speculative thought, whether they are in the context of the ritual of the sacrifice (*yajña*), or on the concept of the concentrated inner experience (*yoga*). The vedic seers conceived of all forces being co-



ordinated in man. Narayana was the composer of the *Hymn to Man (Puruṣasūkta)*. He called the well-ordered integration of all cosmic forces by the name of man (*puruṣa*). This conception was subsequently applied in the sacrificial ritual (*yajña*), especially in the construction of the fire altar (*agnicayana*). In the altar construction fire (*agni*) is worshipped as bird-man. The construction has been described at length in the *Taittirīya* and *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇas*. The construction has great significance and provides a starting point for the history of Indian architecture and iconography, and is relevant for a proper understanding of the underlying principles of the construction of the Sanskrit theater. The ground plan of the Hindu temple is visualized as the architectural man (*vāstupuruṣa*) and is drawn in the likeness of man. As in the case of the vedic altar (*agnicayana*), no bricks are laid which have not been identified with the several parts of the body. Stella Kramrisch sums up the details thus: "The reference to the figure of man as a place of coordinated function is made factually and repeatedly in Brahminism and Buddhism in sacred texts and works of art."<sup>6</sup>

Countless examples of the principle of the one and the many and the image of the cosmos as the body of man can be cited. For our purposes, it is sufficient to remember that the theory of *rasa*, in its aspect of transcendental experience, intangible and formless, and its aspect of the specificity of different types of states, translated as sentiments, moods, and so on (the eight or nine *rasa*), is the direct result of the world view embodied in Sanskrit literature which preceded the writing of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* by several centuries. The theory of *rasa* cogently brings together the two parallel developments of concrete, though symbolic, sacrificial ritual (*yajña*) elaborated upon in the *Brāhmaṇas*, and the chiselled, abstract, speculative thought of the *Upaniṣads*.

One could pause here to identify the exact contours of this evolution in time and to indicate the primary evidence which supports this point of view. Our task, however, is not to attempt this, but only to draw attention to the fact that no one art, or any element in a particular art, can be understood without a recognition of this foundation and ground plan of early speculative thought, and the framework of abstraction and concretization, mutual dependence and complementariness of the arts and of specific elements within an art. In short, the organic structure is basic.<sup>7</sup>

Viewed thus, it is no wonder that the production of a play or the

creation of drama is conceived by Bharata "as an amalgam of all the Arts which will conduce duty, wealth and fame and will incorporate the teachings of the *Śāstras* and will finally evoke a tranquil state of Mind." (*Nāṭyaśāstra* 1.116-117; 1.119-120. References to Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, 1st ed., Gaekwad Oriental Series [Baroda, 1954] are henceforth abbreviated *NS*. Numerals refer to chapter and verse numbers.)

Bharata, thereafter, proceeds to identify the different elements that go into the making of a dramatic spectacle. He analyzes word, sound, movement, line, color, and, finally, the inner states of being, which are evoked through different elements of the performance. In addition, a whole system of correlation and correspondence is worked out, where the smallest unit of any physical medium is capable of evoking a corresponding transient or permanent mental state. Understandably, the ultimate goal of this system is not pure geometry of design; instead, it is a consciously evolved vocabulary for evoking the formless experience of *rasa* through concrete signs and symbols. The structure of the play and the performance is determined by the aim of evoking this experiential state of beatitude (*rasa*) through a complex methodology of impersonalizing emotion (*bhāva*) and presenting it through diverse media.

The framework and infrastructure of technique are constructed on the recognition of the principle of using both the eye and the ear as vehicles of communication. Little wonder that the *Nāṭyaśāstra* repeatedly stresses that drama is both to be seen (*drśya*) and heard (*śrāvya*) (*NS* 1.7-12). It is also based on the faith that drama is analogous to the vedic ritual (*yajña*), where each part assumes symbolic significance (*NS* 1.129-130). In another verse in the same chapter (*NS* 1.13), the highly loaded contextual term *yoga* is used to suggest the essential prerequisite of a state of intense inward concentration before the aesthetic framework could be evolved.

Now this theatrical art borrows from several sources, both in content and form, and Bharata quite candidly acknowledges this debt when he speaks of having created a fifth *Veda* by taking the recited or heard word (*paṭhya*) from the *Rgveda*, the sound or music (*gīta*) from the *Sāmaveda*, the mime and acting techniques (*abhinaya*) from the *Yajurveda*, and the states of being or sentiments (*rasa*) from the *Atharvaveda* (*NS* 1.17-18). His acknowledg-

ment is no mere lip service, but is in fact a significant statement which draws attention to both the vedic world view and the instruments of communication used in the four *Vedas*, and all that we have referred to above. Indeed, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* could be broken down into a series of formal elements which move in parallel lines and each could be traced back to its vedic source.

For example, the *R̥gveda* gives rise to the recited word (*pāṭhya*), which in turn forms the basis of dramatic speech (*vācika*), which is related to a particular style (*vṛtti*), in this case the verbal style (*bhārati vṛtti*). Relating this style to the appropriate region in which the drama is set gives local usage (*pravṛtti*). Further, the speech elements can be broken up into meaning and sound value units, and the syllables, words, meters, and rhyme patterns then investigated in order to establish a correspondence between them and their capacity to present transient (*samcārin*) and dominant (*sthāyin*) feelings or emotions (*bhāva*).

What is true of the exploration of speech and the word in this manner is equally true of movement, or that which pertains to the limbs of the body (*āṅgika*). The *Yajurveda* is seen as the original source for this use of the body and its movements as essential tools of drama, and rightly so, for it is in this *Veda* and its connected *Brāhmaṇas* that a methodology for establishing a correspondence between the the physical microcosm of the body and its limbs and the macrocosm evolved.

Thus the *Yajurveda* provides the basis for communication through movement of the body (*āṅgika*), one of the four elements of acting (*abhinaya*). This movement relates to a particular style (*vṛtti*), in this case the grand and dynamic style (*sāttavati vṛtti*), which in turn suggests either the conventionalized (*nāṭyadharmin*) or naturalistic (*lokadharmin*) manner of presentation. The techniques of movement within their style of presentation are then adapted to accord with regional characteristics (*pravṛtti*). Further, this movement functions within the framework of the physical space of the stage, which is divided into two levels, in terms of height, and into two different acting areas (NŚ 10; discussion of acting areas called *kakṣyavibhāga*).

At the same time, movements of the body (*āṅgika*) do not function alone, but rather are a vehicle of communication within an artistic form which is a total amalgam of various media of expression. They are integral to the dramatic spectacle, and are in no

way embellishments and adjuncts to a form of theater which depended only upon the recited or sung word. All elements are equally important. Thus, the four media of performance according to the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and actuality—word, recited and/or sung; movement, pure or interpretative; makeup, properties and decor; and expressions of internalized states—are four interlocked elements of acting. They constitute the steel framework on which the dramatic spectacle is built.

While playing a distinct and unique role, the purposeful use of each in the totality of the dramatic spectacle is achieved through a rigorous system of interdependence. The key to an understanding of this structure is this system of correspondence between thematic content and form in a general sense, and among diverse media and styles in a more particular sense. Thus, while our concern here is only with movement, it must always be seen as part of a whole, with a complete, autonomous system—which we may call dance for the sake of convenience—which was always considered in relation to the total dramatic spectacle.

Let us now examine how this language of movement, or expression through the human body, enters into Sanskrit theater, on the level both of theoretical formulation and creativity. This complex consideration of the subject can be broken up into three distinct divisions: (1) the movement of the entire body in relation to physical space, both in the selection of site and the ground plan of the theater and the symbolic installation of the pole (*jarjara*) during the preliminaries (*pūrvavarāṅga*); (2) the analysis of the human body and its organs and limbs with a view to examining the possibilities of expression and evoking psychic responses, singly and collectively; and (3) the methodology by which relationships are established between micro movements (facial and hand) and macro movements (those of the head, chest, arms, legs) and the word (recited or sung), music (vocal or instrumental), and the metrical cycle.

The discussion of the importance of human movement as an integral part of the dramatic spectacle can be traced through theoretical texts on drama ranging from the time of Bharata to Ramachandra, writing in the twelfth century A.D.\* We will, however, restrict ourselves to the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, for it provides the basis for all subsequent writing.

First, let us run through the first few chapters of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* to gain an understanding of the vital role of movement in relation

to the physical space of the theater, both in the selection of the site of the performance and in that part of the play called the preliminaries (*pūrvaraṅga*) where many dances are performed. First and foremost is the selection of the site, the consecration of the site, the measuring of the earth, and the construction of the different types of playhouses. Then the stage is consecrated and numerous oblations are offered to the deities installed at cardinal points from the stage. A close reading of chapters 1, 2, and 3 of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* makes it clear that each single phase, whether it is the consecration of the earth, or the adoption of a particular ground plan for the theater, or the symbolic placing of the different deities, or the oblations, the whole physical ground and elevation plan is designed to correspond to an altar of the vedic sacrifice. Meticulous attention to detail is an imperative; there is no room for chance or free expression. We are told that unless these rigorously prescribed procedures are followed, disaster will inevitably follow. Indeed, Bharata uses the word worship (*pūjā*) in this context several times (*NŚ* 1.121–122; 3.97–98). Apart from the implied correspondence between the movement of the cosmos and the ground plan of the theater and the space of the stage, the part played by the purified body is of great significance.

Only he who has purified his body and kept his senses under control is capable of consecrating the playhouse (*NŚ* 1.23; 2.51–52; 3.1–8; 4.17). Many regional dance drama forms which are still performed today in India, particularly the three different forms of Chhau (masked drama), rigorously observe these preliminary rites before a performance.<sup>9</sup> These include fasting, the consecration of the ground, the installation of a pole, and lastly, the consecration of a pitcher of water. The human being who performs these becomes an “initiate,” a special person for the duration of the event, and the physical space, both on the ground and in relation to the total peripheral environment, acquires a new meaning. The worship (*pūjā*) performed on both the Sanskrit stage and in its living continuations—regional theater forms like Kūṭiyāṭṭam and Mayūrabhanja—provide concrete examples of how human movement is used for symbolic purposes in essential preliminaries before the performance. Although Bharata himself passes lightly over this matter, it is clear that the rites of the stage are indeed a continuation of the rites and rituals of the different sacrifices described in the *Vedas* and the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*.

This, however, is only the first step. Within this physical struc-

ture and on the consecrated earth, the preliminaries proper (*pūrvavaraṅga*) begin. And what are these preliminaries? Chapter 4 of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* describes them in detail. Briefly, they consist of two large sequences; one, the purely musical overture, and the other when the director (*sūtradhara*) and his attendants enter to execute a series of movements.

The performance of the preliminaries presuppose the plan of the Sanskrit stage. The acting area—whether divided into two levels, the back stage and front stage, or one level—always works out as a rectangular space. This is further divided into six subareas, usually squares. This plan is basic, notwithstanding the controversies regarding the exact dimensions of the stage and the different types of theater plans. The musicians sit in the area at the rear of stage center, and on either side of them is a door for entries and exits.

The first section of the preliminaries comprises the entry and seating of the musicians, the singing of musical scales, the tuning of musical instruments, both stringed and percussion, the rehearsing of the manner of clapping to keep time, and finally, the singing of a song (*NŚ* 4.9–11). The second is subdivided into nine phases. Among them is one where the director enters the stage with two attendants. The entry is dramatic and visually arresting. The pose of the director is precisely described; it is akin to the *demiplié* of Western classical ballet. The trio enters, each in this initial pose, in a triangular formation. The director forms the apex of the triangle and the other two the base. The basic motif of the initial pose is the triangle of the body created by the outward flexion of the knees; this is reinforced by a choreographic pattern on the ground space which is also a triangle. The trio moves together from back stage right to front stage center. The two attendants hold flowers and the director a flagpole (*jarjara*). The front stage central square is both the mythical and actual center, and is identified with the deity *Brahmā* (who stands for totality in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* mythology). Here the flagpole, a symbol of fertility and success, is installed through movement. The formation of the three remains intact, although each member has a specific role to perform. While the director installs the flagpole the other two offer flowers and sprinkle water from vases or pitchers they carry presumably on their heads. After performing this sequence, which is both dance and ritual, the trio, still in formation, moves to front stage left where other deities are propitiated, and then to front stage right. From

front stage right they return to front stage center and finally to back stage center where the musicians are seated.

Throughout this sequence a particular melody is sung in specific meters to an accelerating tempo. The first entries are in a slow tempo, the finale in a double tempo. Bharata takes pains to emphasize the need for precise synchronization of the melodic line, the metrical cycle, and the tempo. The sequence aims at propitiating the deities of the four directions and offering oblations which have ritual significance (NŚ 4.63–102). An actual presentation of this section (*parivartana*, literally circumambulation) is, in no uncertain terms, a piece of dance choreography with specified musical accompaniment.

This ritualistic dance sequence is followed by a verbal enunciation and a recitation of mnemonics. From these phases the preliminaries move to the first introduction of the sung word and the presentation of movement. The next phase, called the door of the theater (*raṅgadvāra*), establishes the proper mood for the play which follows; an appropriate song is sung. This is interpreted through mime, facial expressions, and hand gestures and is followed by another piece of dance choreography which introduces two categories of movements. These are primary units of movements which Bharata discusses in subsequent chapters of his work. They are called walking movements (*cārī*) and the grand or large movements (*mahācārī*). In dance terms, they are dance numbers which are first lyrically gentle and without open leg positions and then large scale in which the limbs are used with maximum extension away from the body. They are to be performed by female dancers.

This recounting will perhaps make it clear that the preliminaries of the Sanskrit stage themselves are an indicator of the nature of this theater, and of its integrated multimedia approach. Also, a continuum is established between the level of sacred ritual, where an attempt is made to transform the stage space into cosmic space, and the level of human action. The stylized movement patterns are the tool for communicating this continuum.

The concluding phase of this long second section of the preliminaries is followed by the reentry of the director and his two attendants, this time in a freer choreography called the "three men's walking" (*trigata*), and in it the director engages in witty dialogue with his attendants. It also must be executed in choreographic pat-

terns of movement according to detailed descriptions given by Bharata. Even the distance between the feet of each of these actors and the manner of moving in place and covering space is prescribed (NŚ 5.75). Many technical terms for dance mentioned in subsequent chapters of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* are used here to describe movements of each of the three actors (NŚ 5.77–88).

A careful reading of chapter 5 makes it quite clear that a precise presentation of the preliminaries would demand exacting skills in dance and mime, and not mere verbal acting. Many basic body positions or stances (*sthāna* and *maṇḍala*) of the actors are prescribed for the “three men’s walking” phase and other sections of the preliminaries. Particular hand gestures and movements of the legs are meticulously described. The accompanying rhythmic units (*tāla*) and the melodic compositions (*dhruva*) are also indicated. Further, Bharata goes on to discuss the appropriateness of different tempos for particular types of theater buildings. In the larger space of the square type of theater slower tempos—providing an opportunity for full movement across the stage—are prescribed. Dances of short duration in quick tempos are recommended for the smaller, triangular theater.

In chapter 4 Bharata discusses two other questions which are pertinent to a consideration of movement. The first is the question of the value and utility of dance, and the second is the specific category of group dances by women, which constitute an initial phase of the preliminaries.

When he is asked about the use of mime and dance in theater, Bharata’s answer is clear and unequivocal. Mime (*abhinaya*) is a vehicle for communicating the sense of the songs (NŚ 4.268–269), and dance (*nṛtta*) serves the purpose of creating beauty in a play (NŚ 4.268–272 ff.). Further, he notes that dance has an auspicious function. It is in this context that the style of dance as taught by Taṇḍu, and called *tāṇḍava*, and the softer lyrical dance of Parvati, called *sukumāra prayoga*, are first mentioned (NŚ 4.274).

There is an elaborate discussion, thereafter, of the dances of the women—some solo, others duet, and yet others in groups. The choreographic patterns of the group dances of the women are called by the generic name *piṇḍibandha* (literally, the formation of a lump or mass). This expressive term stands for a series of compositions which have the common feature of a chain formation of interlocked hands and arms, and for those which, by and large, sug-



gest circular movement patterns. When the formation is closed, moves towards the center and forms a cluster, it is called a cluster (*gulma*). When the circle opens, hands and arms are interlocked and a chain formation is executed (*śṛṅkhalikā*). Separation of the dancers is suggested in the final phases, in a radial pattern called dividing or separating (*bhedyaka*). Details of these choreographic patterns are spelled out in many verses of the chapter (NS 4.286–294); it is clear that the preliminaries of the Sanskrit theater comprised ritual or obeisance to the deities of the different directions, the establishment of a center of the stage, and the performance of many dances, both by women and by the director and his assistants. And, we may note, the female dancers and the actor-dancers (the director and his assistants) shared a common vocabulary of movement which evolved through a perceptive, detailed analysis of different parts of body and their potential for movement.

Although Bharata discusses the cadences of movement in chapters 4 and 5, and devotes large sections to them, both as primary and secondary units (*karaṇa* and *aṅghara*), none of this can be understood without reference to the detailed analysis of the human body and the movements of each part, or limb, which follows in many subsequent chapters of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Indeed, in chapters 9, 10, 11, and 12, Bharata displays an extraordinary awareness of anatomy, physiological possibilities, and the psychic emotive power of physical movement. Although in its present state the order of the chapters of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and its translations present a confused jigsaw puzzle, a rearrangement of some of these chapters reveals a scientific system of movement technique which is built upon a minute examination of the body's articulation, ranging from its smallest physical units to the body in its entirety.

The detail of Bharata's analysis is such that it would be unreasonable to attempt even a digest of these chapters here. What should be emphasized is that this minute analysis is not confined to what would be termed "dance" today, but rather the concern is with movement as it permeates the entire fabric of the dramatic structure. Thus, particular movements of single parts of the human body—such as the head, eyes, eyebrows, cheeks, lips, chin, hands, chest, abdomen, hips, thighs, and feet—are considered suitable for incorporation into the acting techniques. Movements of the whole body—such as particular stances or postures, the different type of standing, sitting, and reclining positions, a variety of

gaits and walking movements, and cadences of movement (which combine the posture, the gait, and the walking style)—are executed in an initial first position followed by a covering of space and culminating in another final stance. These are essential for the presentation of certain moods, emotions, situations, and the establishment of a particular locale in the drama. It must nevertheless be remembered that this same movement vocabulary constitutes a full grammar of dance as an independent art form as well, but here we are concerned with its place and relevance to dramatic structure.<sup>10</sup>

Bharata makes an unqualified distinction between mime and gesture (*abhinaya*), which is related to the word, throughout the presentation of the play and dance (*nṛtta*) as pure movement, which must enter the body of the play on certain occasions only. He has a great deal to say about pure dance and devotes nearly ten verses (*NS* 4.314–323) to it. While he considers it appropriate with a song or the occasion of a love or marriage scene, he forbids it in a scene which presents an enraged heroine or a lovers' quarrel. It is recommended for incorporation into a scene of the adoration of deities, but not when messengers bring news causing anxiety or during serious dialogue. In short, selectivity and discrimination is of the essence and there is no blanket approval or disapproval of dance. Indeed, this is another example of Bharata's insistence on the balancing and proportioning of the different media of speech, mime, dance, music, decor, costuming, and makeup as his central theme.

Obviously, none of this elaborate codification and systemization of the techniques of physical movement in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* would be meaningful if it were not strongly supported by the evidence of the creative and purposeful use of this movement by the dramatist who wrote, as we have said, not literary dramas to be read, but theater scripts to be performed. Also, the continued discussion of the actor's physical movement in later texts and treatises on the theory and technique of drama could have been necessitated only if the creative artist continued to abide by the tenets of these early formulations.

The whole range of Sanskrit drama could be analyzed from the point of view of mime (*abhinaya*) and dance proper (*nṛtta* and *nṛtya*). The evidence of the importance of theatrical movement is impressive and incontrovertible for its consistency, ranging from

the works of Aśvaghōṣa to those of Rājaśekhara.<sup>11</sup> Here let us note several examples of how the vocabulary of dance is used in certain stock situations of the Sanskrit theater, and then proceed to analyze the text of the play *The Vision of Vāsavadattā* (*Svapnavāsavadattā*) somewhat more closely.

Even casual lay readers of Sanskrit plays are acquainted with the fact that the Sanskrit playwright purposely discarded the so-called unities of time and place. There is frequent mention of walking in the three regions—the sky, the earth, and the nether-world. Some plays give the impression that multiple scenes are taking place on different parts of the same stage, the action of separate groups proceeding simultaneously. Examples of the inclusion of animals, or birds, can be cited. How was all this realized? Was it only through the spoken word or was the aid of stylized movement essential to the theatrical presentation? (Directors of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who have tried to stage Sanskrit plays with backdrops, painted scenery, and stage properties have found the transitions from scene to scene and communicating a progression in time very difficult to manage.)

Act VI of *Śakuntala*, or *The Recovery of the Ring*, by Kālidāsa, begins with the descent of a celestial nymph, Sanumati, from the sky. Descending from the sky could be communicated either through movement or through a dialogue. A stage direction in the text tells us that she descended from the sky through an appropriate movement. That movement is a sequence described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* as the “descent of the river Gaṅgā” (*gaṅgāvataraṇa-karaṇa*). Bharata describes this elaborately (NŚ 4.169). It is, in fact, an acrobatic movement: following a cartwheel action the dancer lands on both palms on the ground.<sup>12</sup> This movement may well have been utilized by the actor or actress who played Sanumati to establish her descent from the sky. Bharata discusses the topic of the gaits of persons moving in, or descending from, the sky in chapter 12, verses 92–95, and suggests a number of alternatives. In Act VII we come across a situation where the king is seen in a celestial car and descends from it. We must remember that the heroine Śakuntalā was not in a hermitage on earth at this moment, but was in one in heaven. Here, too, a series of stylized movements, all from the vocabulary of dance, are used to establish that the venue is the sky and not the earth. A category of movement called “scorpion-legged” (*vr̥ścikalatā*) is prescribed for this. Its character-

istic feature is that while one leg is bent in front, the other is extended at the back. Many sculptural representations of the movement can be seen on Indian monuments.<sup>13</sup> If all the characters in the scene used the movement, and the audience was initiated, there was no need for the aid of words or scenic decor.

To suggest walking or swimming in water, equally difficult, Bharata prescribes particular gaits and movements (*NŚ* 12.102, 105, 178ff.). The riding of animals or chariots, and their movement from one place to another, is frequently called for in plays. Here, too, the actor must be skilled in dance in order to execute complex movements of the feet, legs, arms, and hands. A classic example (also mentioned by V. Raghavan) comes from the same play in Act I. The entry of the king is announced by a stage direction which reads, "Enter King and charioteer riding a chariot." While it would be permissible in the naturalistic mode of presentation (*lokadharmī*) to use stage properties, the more sophisticated and effective method would be through the stylized mode of presentation (*nāṭyadharmī*). If the latter convention was followed, then the king would be seen in a stance where the foot of one leg would rest on the knee of the other, suggesting sitting (while actually standing), and the charioteer would be seen in a similar position where the foot of one leg would be raised from the ground to a position where the knee of the raised leg would be at waist level. The king would use hand gestures suggesting a bow and arrow and the charioteer would cross his hands at chest level suggesting the holding of the reins of the horses. The double hand gesture prescribed for this is the "mouth of the bracelet" (*kaṭakāmukha*, *NŚ* 9.60-63). The two actors would move together in a synchronized movement called *cūraṇa gati* (*NŚ* 12.88-92), which is a toe-heel movement of the feet. The stylized pose, the use of the hand gesture, and the particular steps which, when actually performed, create the effect of the sound of horse hoofs, would and does create a vivid impression of the chariot, the horses, and the two men chasing a deer.

The two men at first execute these movements in a slow tempo. Then the speech of the king suggests that the animal must be killed and the chariot travels over uneven ground. This suggests a clever use of the two levels of the stage. The actors had entered through the door at the back of the stage. At this point, they move forward onto the lower level of the stage in a fast tempo. As the king and the charioteer are moving diagonally from back stage to front

stage on one side, simultaneously the actor who is undoubtedly presenting the movements of the deer enters on another section of the stage. The actor playing the deer executes movements which are described in the speech of the king. Once again, we can turn to Bharata for the exact movements of the lower limbs and the walking style which must be employed to depict a male or female deer. The cadence is literally called "the jump of the deer" (*harin̐pluta*, NŚ 10.43). The hand gestures which supplement the movement of the lower limbs are known as the "deer-headed gesture" (*mṛgaśirṣa*, NŚ 9.86); in it, three fingers are extended outwards (away from the palm), and the thumb and the little finger are at right angles while the palm faces away from the body. This lively piece of miming culminates in an exciting movement when the king is about to, but does not actually, release his arrow, which is shown through another set of arm and hand gestures. At this point, the king changes his stance from the sitting position to one which is prescribed for those who have to enact the release of arrows or missiles. Bharata mentions many stances. Among them are the wide, square leg position (*maṇḍalasthāna*) and the wider, extended leg position (*alīḍha*). Indeed, the many scenes of fighting, combat, and hunting in Sanskrit plays would have been interpreted through movements discussed in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, specifically in the context of the use of hand weapons and the release of missiles (NŚ 10.60–78).

When examples of this movement technique are verbalized they may seem halting and cumbersome. When actually executed on-stage by actors trained in dance, they would be the quintessence of grace and would, in fact, endow the dramatic action with an effortless flow. In the last example, the king and the charioteer moved with ease from the forest to the hermitage, and from one level of ground to the other, without the aid of lights, sets, or props. What follows in the same act is an even more interesting example of how mime contributes to the smooth flow of scenes in Sanskrit staging. The king hides behind a bush (but there are no representations of bushes on the stage, there are only pillars). This is suggested by both the king's and the charioteer's withdrawal to one corner of the front stage left. Through conventional arm movements and hand gestures they signify to the audience that they are invisible to the other characters on the stage, while remaining visible to the audience. Then Śakuntalā and her friends enter. They

walk in gaits prescribed for the graceful walking of women and execute a lyrical bit of mime suggesting the plants and the various creepers and flowers of the hermitage and the action of watering them.<sup>14</sup> The person playing the part of Śakuntalā must be a consummate dancer, and portray the bumblebee through gestures of the eyes, the neck, the hands, and the feet. The king, who watches all this, describes, in a poignant speech, the beginning of his state of love. However, what he says in words, he supplements through hand gestures without moving from his place behind or near a pillar. Here is an excellent example of Bharata's principle of relating the word to the gesture.

What Śakuntalā and her friends present, through descriptively miming the watering of plants and showing the diverse vegetation of the garden with their whole bodies and movements of their limbs, is called "branching out" (*śakha*). This is followed by Śakuntalā's first showing, through movement, the disturbance caused by the bee—what Bharata calls "pointing out first through gestures" (*sūci*)—and then describing it through speech. What the king does, as observer-narrator of the scene in another section of the stage, is known as the "sprouting," employing hand and facial gestures (*ānkura*) only.<sup>15</sup> All this would be presented in the lyrical or graceful style (*kaiśikī vṛtti*). It will be obvious that in the first section there is a synchronization of word, sound, and movement of the limbs; in the second, the mime precedes the verbal enunciation; and in the third, only through micromovements of the face and hands is the meaning recapitulated or narrated. Countless examples could be cited from Sanskrit drama of the consistent and self-conscious incorporation of these techniques of movement by the dramatists, who were both creative writers and consummate theater artists fully conversant with the vocabulary of stylized movement and the methodology of making it integral to dramatic performance.

We may conclude this section of selected examples from Sanskrit plays by drawing attention to two situations in another play by Kālidāsa, *Malavikāgnimitra* (*Malavikā* is the heroine and *Agni-mitra* is the king-hero). The heroine is being taught dancing by two teachers. The dramatic plot revolves around the occasion of the dance performance where the king beholds the heroine *Mālavikā* dancing and falls in love with her. A full discussion of the qualities of the dance and dancer takes place. The demands of training aus-

terity—of the necessity of having perfect understanding of words, music and rhythm—are brought out by all those who discuss the performance. Each member of the audience, the two masters, a Buddhist nun, and others, display a remarkable familiarity with the technical terminology of the dance. The full import of the play's dialogue can only be understood by those who know Sanskrit dance terms, for Kālidāsa is using the vocabulary of dance of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* on one level, and on the other is presenting a dramatic sequence which is a turning point of the plot. The whole sequence is an extraordinary example of word play, multiple meaning,<sup>16</sup> and a critical appraisal of dance. Dance here enters into the fabric of the dramatic structure as an autonomous unit, unlike the examples we have quoted above. Other Sanskrit dramatists have used the same device for introducing a full-fledged dance recital into their plays. Harṣa's *Ratnāvalī*, for example, opens with a collective dance performed as part of a spring festival.

In *Mālavikā and Agnimitra* there is one more situation where the skills of a dancer are indispensable. The situation concerns the king's desire to have a clandestine rendezvous with Mālavikā. This is cleverly arranged by the jester, who requests the king's elder queen to allow Mālavikā—who, though a princess, is serving as a maid in the palace—to perform the ceremony of "clasping a tree" (*aśokadohada*, the "tree and woman" motif of Indian sculpture). The myth is well known in India and is seen in many sculptural reliefs.<sup>17</sup> It is based on a belief that the tree, *aśoka*, longs for the embrace of a young woman before it blossoms. Thus, special ceremonies were held when beautiful young women clasped trees to fulfill the desire of the tree. In the play, Mālavikā performs this ceremony on one area of the stage without the help of any prop or stage tree. Instead, she enacts it through a movement sequence which establishes the tree, her clasping it, caressing it, and, ultimately, freezing in a stylized pose (*aśvakrānta*) which Bharata prescribes for the woman who depicts the scene on the stage (NS 12.175-176).

Let us move from these brief examples to *The Vision of Vāsavadattā* and investigate the part played by movement, mime (*āṅgika abhinaya*) and dance (*nṛtta*) throughout the play. The prologue opens with a stage direction, "At the end of the opening ceremony enter the stage manager."<sup>18</sup> We can presume that the opening ceremony must have consisted of the sequences of group compositions

which have been described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (the cluster formations called *piṇḍibandha*). Padmāvati enters from one of the doors at the back of the stage and a Lady Hermit is discovered seated. Here, a route from the forest road to the hermitage is being traversed. Obviously this movement from the forest to the hermitage is presented through the use of the convention of the zonal divisions (*kakṣyāvibhāga*). As in *Śakuntala*, walking from the rear of the stage to the front may have been done in a diagonal line. Many asides occur in this first scene, and all are established according to the normal convention of using a hand gesture in which the erect palm faces the mouth, with the ring finger bent (*tripatāka*, NŚ, 9.26–32).

Bhāsa's text says of the Lady Hermit, "A lady hermit enters seated." We may well ask why the dramatist uses this seemingly contradictory phrase. Although it has been suggested that a curtain may have been used at this point, it is also likely that the actress in the role of the Lady Hermit entered the stage in a stylized movement which suggested sitting and that the performer, in fact, moved in this sitting stance. Also, we must remember that the character is an ascetic. Bharata refers several times to both movements of those "seen seated" and to the gaits (*gati*) of ascetics. He prescribes the equibalanced posture (*samapādasthāna*), akin to the first position of Western classical ballet, for ascetics (NŚ 12.79–86), and he refers specifically to women ascetics (NŚ 12.200–201), speaking of the movement, called *samapādacāri* ("walking in steady equidistant steps"). Seats of deer skin and the like are recommended for ascetics (NŚ 12.222). It is clear that in this seemingly simple stage direction is a clue suggesting how the performer would, through a formal language of gesture, stance, and minimal use of stage properties, accomplish even the paradoxical action of "entering seated."

Somewhat later in Act I a student enters and the stage direction reads, "Looking upward." The stage direction is followed by his speech: "It is midday and I am tired out; where shall I take rest?" This stage direction is no mere description for readers but is a technical aid to the actor for incorporating a set of arm and hand movements, along with eye movements, through which he can establish the idea of midday and the sun at its peak. First he moves; the verbal enunciation of the thought follows. Bharata devoted one chapter to the subject of special representation, or miscellaneous representation (*citrābhinaya*), and speaks of the use of the hands,



arms, head, and eyes for indicating the different time of day, the different seasons, and so on. A pair of "flag-hands" (*patāka*, NŚ 9.17–26), used in varying ways, are prescribed to show different times of the day and the seasons. In this case, possibly from the position of crossed palms, one hand is moved to a point above the head and pauses there to suggest the midday sun. Bharata devotes one whole verse to describing how to indicate the midday sun (NŚ, Kāvya-mālā series, 25.8): the hands should be in the flag gesture, the head uplifted (*udvāhita*, NŚ 8.28), and the eyes half-shut (*ake-karā*, NŚ 8.79). It is only after the actor has performed this whole sequence of movements that he speaks his lines about the sun and finding a place to rest.

The student's speech that follows is a beautiful description of deer grazing, trees tended with loving care, a penance grove, and the smoke that arises from many altars. We must likewise remember that this is a verse in the meter called *śardūlavikrīḍita*, and it provides immense opportunity for mime (*abhinaya*). In the course of rendering this verse in a slow recitative mode, the actor supported his verbal enunciation with ample hand gestures. One may reasonably speculate that a pair of the "deer head" (*mṛgaśirṣa*) gestures may have been followed by a pair of the "half-flag hands" (*ardhapatāka*), or hands with a loose fist and the first finger pointing (*sūcimukha*, NŚ 9.64–71) to show trees and creepers, and that this would have slowly changed to a pair of "flag-hands" (*patāka-hasta*), again to suggest the smoke from the altar (NŚ, Kāvya-mālā, 25.7). Naturally, the actor would need great skill in the manipulation of hands, arms, eyes, and head to coordinate these movements with the text of the recited verse. The word-gesture relationship of a descriptive nature, almost like an action song with stylized vocabulary, would be the essence of this presentation. While these subtle techniques may have died out in theater forms in many parts of the country, Kūṭiyāṭṭam in Kerala retains them, and indeed, elaborates upon them. In Kūṭiyāṭṭam, the actor-dancer could reasonably spend a half-hour or more describing the scene just mentioned through the power of mime (*aṅgikābhinaya*).

Another example of the same descriptive variety of mime occurs in the last verse of the act. This time it is set to the metrical pattern called *śikharinī*. It also provides opportunity for a lovely piece of mime. The description of birds retiring, the evening fires of the hermitage, and the setting sun can all be created through gestures and movement patterns prescribed in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The word

picture provides the base for creating a sequence of dance which sets the tone in this first act for the poignant story to unfold.

In Acts II and III, a simpler sequence is incorporated. This is not movement in which word and gesture are coordinated, as before, but abstract movement verging on pure dance (*nr̥tta*). This was no doubt accompanied by music. The stage direction reads, "Enter Padmāvati, playing with a ball, accompanied by her retinue and Vāsavadattā." The whole game of ball is a clever device for introducing a dance sequence into the play; many dance styles in India today have individual numbers which revolve around playing ball. The feminine portions of contemporary Kathakali and Mohiniāṭṭam in Kerala incorporate these as standard numbers in a recital. It should be understood that there was no actual ball—the game was executed as a dance sequence that stood alone, preceding the verbal dialogue.

The mood of the play changes in Act III; we encounter Vāsavadattā in the palace garden. The stage direction tells us she is deep in thought. This stage direction rests directly on a stock technical injunction regarding how women in love and anxiety (*cintā*) should speak to maids and female messengers (*dūtī*). Bharata refers to it in many places but especially in the chapter on basic representation (*sāmānyābhinaya*, NŚ, Kāvya-mālā, 32.159), where he prescribes the appropriate hand, head, and eye movements for it. Then the women speak of picking flowers and making a garland. Here, undoubtedly, the lines describing picking flowers, putting them in the basket, and making a garland were accompanied by an effective piece of mime. The hand gesture called *kaṭakāmukha* (NŚ 9.60–63) is prescribed both for the making of garlands and the plucking of flowers. In Act IV the gestures must have been repeated to reinforce the dialogue.

Also in Act IV a change of scene occurs after the exit of the jester and before the entry of Padmāvati and her retinue. Establishing the new locale was undoubtedly accomplished through a meticulous use of different acting areas in keeping with the conventions of the zonal divisions (*kakṣyāvibhāga*). More important, however, are the verses (*śloka*) of the king in the *śardūlavikrīḍita* and *vasantatilakā* meters.<sup>19</sup> These verses are moving pieces of poetry in themselves; they are also the occasion for presenting yet another subtle type of mime (*abhinaya*). This time the whole body, the arms, and the hand gestures are used minimally, while the emphasis is on interpretative mime through micromovements of the fa-

cial muscles, eyes, eyelids, cheeks, and mouth (*mukhaja abhinaya* of the *ankura* type). Hand movements must no doubt have been used to a degree, for there is a good deal of description of cranes, sky, and other natural phenomena, but the beauty of the verses could be adequately expressed only through a subtler form of mime, which "sprouted" delicately (*ankura*) from the spoken text.

The quick repartee that follows between the jester, the king, and Padmāvati is prose dialogue, but it concludes with a few verses by the king which may or may not have been rendered through mime. Most of Act IV demands an exacting choreographic sense to communicate the flow of action from the king and jester in one zone to the women characters in another zone. It also demands great ability in pure dance to establish bowers, gardens, creepers, and the varied richness of nature without the use of stage sets, props, or lighting effects. Instrumental music and percussion effects may have been used in the scene to support the theatrical illusion. The style is throughout soft and lyrical, corresponding perfectly to what Bharata called the *kaiśikī vṛtti*, or graceful style. The mode of presentation is also stylized, belonging strictly to what Bharata called *nāṭyadharmī*, or conventionalized theater, as opposed to the naturalistic or realistic mode (*lokadharmī*).

And finally, in the dream sequence of Act V, we have a perfect example of a dramatic scene being communicated through stylized movement and a minimal use of words. The illusion of a dream conversation can be conveyed with a masterfully light touch and with great poignancy through physical expression. Only through the aid of a highly stylized vocabulary of abstract and suggestive movement capable of conveying a state of emotion (*bhāva*), which was the final goal of the play, could this be achieved.

It is hoped that this brief analysis will have made clear that while the dramatist was steeped in a knowledge of the technical details of theatrical movement, and was aware of its many elements, he was equally conscious of the need to submerge the parts into the whole in order to evoke in the spectator a state of mind that corresponds to the emotion (*bhāva*) being evidenced on the stage. It will also be evident that while the ultimate state of beatitude or *rasa* is evoked through the specificity of the sense perceptions of the eye and ear, this experiential emotional state transcends the specificity.

This then, is just one among many examples of how the spirit

and essence of early speculative thought percolates into the form and body of Sanskrit drama. The movements of the body, with a stylized vocabulary, are integral to the dramatic spectacle.

## Notes

1. A. B. Keith, *Sanskrit Drama* (London: Oxford University Press, 1924).
2. *Viṣṇudharmottara Pūraṇa* 3.34.
3. *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* (Anandashram Poona series) 3.14.332-333.
4. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (Bombay: Lakshmi Venkateshwar Press) 10.5.2.14.
5. *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 1.2.12-13. See also preceding verses 9-10, 11. English translation in V. Raghavan, *The Indian Heritage* (Bangalore: Indian Institute of Culture), p. 61. For other references to similar ideas, see Theodore de Bary et al., eds., *The Sources of Indian Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), pp. 24-36.
6. Stella Kramrisch, *The Hindu Temple* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1946), p. 71.
7. See Kapila Vatsyayan, *Classical Indian Dance in Literature and the Arts* (New Delhi: Sangeet Natak Akademi, 1968), pp. 5-24, for a fuller discussion of the underlying unity of Indian arts.
8. For references to a discussion of physical movement (*aṅgika*), see: Dhanamjaya, *Daśarūpa*, chap. 5; Ramachandra and Gunachandra, *Nāṭyadarpaṇa*; Bhoja, *Śṛṅgāra Prakāśa*; Śaradātanaya, *Bhāvaprakāśa*; Sagaranandin, *Nāṭakalakṣaṇaratnakōśa*; and Dāmodaragupta, *Kuṭṭanīmata*. Also see Vatsyayan, *Classical Indian Dance*, chap. 2, where some of these texts are analyzed.
9. Kapila Vatsyayan, "Mayūrabhanja Chhau," *Journal of the National Centre for the Performing Arts* 4, no. 4 (December 1975).
10. See Vatsyayan, *Classical Indian Dance*, chap. 2, where the technique of dance has been discussed on the basis of several Sanskrit texts.
11. See *ibid.*, chap. 3, where an analysis of these works has been attempted, and see charts on pp. 28, 37.
12. *Nāṭyaśāstra*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Baroda), p. 137, pl. 18, based on the sculptural relief in the Cidambaram temple in Tamilnadu.
13. Vatsyayan, *Classical Indian Dance*, illus. 43-55.
14. For a detailed description of this scene, see *ibid.*, p. 251.
15. *Nāṭyaśāstra* (Kāvya-mālā series) 22.42-44.
16. Kālidāsa, *Mālavikāgnimitra*, Act I, vv. 16-17 ff.; and Vatsyayan, *Classical Indian Dance*, pp. 239-242.
17. See Vatsyayan, *Classical Indian Dance*, figs. 4, 6, 10.
18. References are to the English translation of the play in H. W. Wells, ed., *Six Sanskrit Plays in English Translation* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1964), pp. 6-38.
19. See Wells, *Six Sanskrit Plays*, pp. 21-22, and vv. 17, 18.

## PART II

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# PERFORMANCE TODAY



THE SECOND major question addressed by the conference was: How can Sanskrit plays be staged today? The scholar investigates the theatrical past, building a body of knowledge based on facts and their interpretation. Then the artist must take that knowledge and creatively project it into the present. But regrettably few productions of Sanskrit plays are being attempted today. In India, scholars of Sanskrit and traditional musicians and dancers could join with actors and directors (mostly trained in Western theater) to attempt a genuine rediscovery of their fragmented theater tradition through collaborative productions. This has yet to happen in a significant way and the two groups remain more or less in separate worlds, past and present. The need for creative exploration is as obvious as it is difficult.

Farley Richmond discusses major problems which face the contemporary director of a Sanskrit play. He is particularly concerned with handling stage space. After reviewing the "garbled information" on the stage in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and examples of Kerala temple stages, he concludes that we cannot know exactly what the Sanskrit theater was like in its details. The contemporary Western proscenium theater is not inappropriate for a modern production. He discusses various approaches the director might use in determining how to handle acting style—including voice and expressive dance—music, properties, makeup, and scenery. He is eclectic in his approach, suggesting that in addition to the evidence of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and such regional theater forms as Kathakali, Kuchipudi, and Kūṭiyāṭṭam, the director can usefully investigate theater practice in other Asian countries where analogous traditions are maintained to this day.

Shanta Gandhi reviews the general characteristics of Sanskrit performing style in preparation for her main topic, her staging of *The Vision of Vāsavadatta* at Kennedy Theater, University of Hawaii, in the spring of 1974. Should a play be selected that will deliberately appeal to the expectations of a Western audience? *The Vision of Vāsavadatta* is an example of a play based on the *rasa* of love and is therefore a typical Sanskrit drama. It was chosen even though Gandhi feels it is a difficult play for an American audience to appreciate. She describes the specific decisions she made in the

course of rehearsals: how to maintain a balance between spoken prose and sung verses; how to design scenery and costumes; how to place her performers on the stage; what type of curtain to use; the amount and kind of gesture language to strive for; and how to incorporate music and dance into the production. A special directing approach is necessary when a cast is non-Indian. In addition to training performers "from scratch" in acting techniques, the director has to help them accept the unfamiliar ethos embodied in the play and its characters, and to become comfortable enough with the *rasa* aesthetic that it can guide and inform their performance.

M. Christopher Byrski is concerned with the Western director's dual problem of how to understand the unique qualities of a Sanskrit play and how to avoid superimposing on it a Western preconception of what the play should be. In Europe, early productions of Indian plays were little more than excuses for doing melodramas and operettas in a new exotic setting. A serious obstacle preventing even the genuinely interested Western artist from understanding the special qualities of a Sanskrit play is that if Western dramaturgical concepts—crisis, climax, denouement, conflict, and the like—are used in analysis, they cannot reveal what the play is in Indian terms. They can only reflect the play in a Western mirror, and the result is distortion. What is required is a concrete method of analysis that is Indian-derived. This exists in the system of five "spans" (*sandhi*) and sixty-four "span elements" (*sandhyāṅga*) of dramatic development which are described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. To demonstrate this uniquely Indian conception of dramatic structure Byrski analyzes *The Vision of Vāsavadattā* in terms of spans.

For the Gandhi production of *The Vision of Vāsavadattā* at the University of Hawaii, Paul Cravath prepared a new acting version of the play under the director's supervision. Written in American English for American audiences, it is intended to be actable while remaining faithful in spirit and form to the original. The Sanskrit text and previous English translations were consulted. The verses (*śloka*) were written and rewritten many times in the attempt to find English to fit Sanskrit metrical patterns. Eleven meters are used: *anuṣṭubh*, *āryā*, *harinī*, *puṣpitāgrā*, *śālīnī*, *śārdūlavikrīḍita*,

*śikharīṇī*, *upajāti*, *upendravajra*, *vaiśvadevī*, and *vasantatilakā*. The meters occurring most frequently are *anuṣṭubh* (twenty-six times) and *vasantatilakā* (eleven times). Of the fifty-seven verses used in the Gandhi production, most were sung in English (verses 1, 34, and 57 were sung in both Sanskrit and English; verses 27, 32, 33, 35, 36, 46, 47, 49, and 50 were spoken). Photographs of this production and others in India, Europe, and the United States offer vivid proof that classical dramas can be staged with vitality and imagination for modern audiences.

General agreement was reached on some of the issues raised in discussion. While it may be that the performance of a play was spread over several days in ancient times, no one proposes that performances today emulate this model. The leisurely milieu of royal courts cannot be duplicated in contemporary society nor do religious imperatives of the past operate today. Except in rare circumstances, the modern performance will have to conclude in a single sitting for the convenience of the audience. For example, in India when a Sanskrit language production is arranged at a university or by a Sanskrit society, the play is drastically shortened to reduce running time to a few hours. Long speeches are cut to the core and the second and third stanzas of a verse are eliminated (V. Raghavan). (Examples of multiday festival performances in other countries, such as the Indonesian *Ramayana Ballet* that takes four nights to complete, were not discussed.) It should be fairly easy to reproduce in most modern theaters the open playing areas of the ancient Sanskrit stage.

Except for an occasional Sanskrit language production, the director in India or the West will work with a translated text (most Indian performances are in contemporary vernacular languages, such as Hindi or Bengali). Few translators make the attempt to recreate the language differences of the Sanskrit and the vernacular Prakrit passages of the original. Sections which were in Sanskrit can be given a more highly conventionalized style of delivery than sections that were in Prakrit (Richmond). A careful translation can indicate by language choice difference of social status among various characters, although this is not often done (James R. Brandon). The level of English that a king speaks can be com-



pletely distinct from the level of a lower ranking person. Local dialects in the language of translation can be used for Prakrits only with caution, for their cultural associations are so strong—Brooklynese or Cockney, for example—that the Indian flavor of the piece can be lost.

Some participants strongly oppose the mingling of sources in preparing a production (Ludo Rocher, Edwin Gerow). There is fear that a performance in which the curtain comes from Kūṭiyāṭṭam, stage dimensions from the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, makeup from Kathakali, dance style from Kuchipudi, and so forth, will be a hybrid, a mongrel, not art at all. To go beyond India, to borrow from Chinese opera or from Japanese Nō, is even more dangerous (Barbara Smith). Yet the director must do precisely this, others hold, if anything is to be produced on the stage (Gandhi, Richmond, Brandon). The *Nāṭyaśāstra*, which everyone rightly reveres, does not provide sufficient specific information for a director to work from this source alone. And since this is true, inevitably the director must turn to other sources for, if not literal models, at least inspiration. If one rigidly disallows mingling sources, production today “is utterly impossible” (Gandhi).

Should a production aim for “authenticity,” however one may define the term, or should the director deliberately adapt performance style to meet specific circumstances? The question was answered in several ways. Essentially the issue is whether the director should approach performance in terms of the Sanskrit tradition or in terms of audience acceptance. Some doubt, as a matter of principle, that the director should even attempt to be authentic. There are two grounds for this view. First, since as it is generally agreed the Sanskrit performing tradition is broken and since factual information on which reconstruction might be based is incomplete and always will be, it is not possible to reconstruct a fully authentic performance today, even under the best of circumstances. Why aim for what we know is impossible? And second, the contemporary audience is not the same as the audience the plays were originally staged for, so that even if the wholly authentic performance were somehow possible today, audience response would be different (Smith). The danger in every attempt at theatri-

cal "reconstruction" is that the performance, irrespective of historical authenticity, will lack relevance for its audience and will be a museum piece (Edward Langhans). This problem seems less pressing for the Indian director than for the Western director. The exact reasons for this were not delved into but they probably include the fact that in India performers can turn to vital regional theatrical traditions for concrete models of performance and that the Indian audience shares with the performers and with the ancient text certain common cultural perceptions, irrespective of the great time gap between ancient and modern India.

For the Western director, however, this is perhaps the overriding issue, for on its resolution will rest the whole interpretation of a production. It is apparent that selecting the play to be staged is part of the issue. As Gandhi notes, the easy way is to choose a play, such as *The Little Clay Cart*, which is filled with action, vital characters, and conflict, and which can therefore be expected to fall within the normal range of audience expectations. That is, choose a play that is not *too* Indian in the first place. On the other hand, the rationale behind selecting the much more subtle *Vision of Vasavadattā* for an American audience was that the play's uniquely Indian characteristics were positive attributes. Its emphasis upon beauty and style, its delicate emotions, and its color and richness are points of interest that could be appreciated even though they might not be important in the usual Western production and even though the play lacked the action and conflict that Western audiences are conditioned to expect (Brandon).

Behind this difference of opinion lie different assessments of the audience's ability (or inability) to be open and to respond to the new. For audiences to develop a genuine ability to appreciate Sanskrit theater, they need to see a number of performances, spread over several years (Richmond). A related viewpoint is that authenticity need not be an absolute standard. Rather, it is important for the director, and all others connected with a production, to study Sanskrit theater practices as deeply as possible and to base their creativity on this knowledge, whether it be incomplete or not, rather than on mere whim or caprice or what may be currently fashionable in Western theater (Harold S. Powers). In this view,

“authenticity” versus “adaptation to audience expectations” seems a false and unnecessary dichotomy. Let the aim be creative interpretation within a spirit of authenticity.

A wholly different directorial approach is to deliberately “de-exoticize” a Sanskrit play for its Western audience. Since it is precisely the culture-bound Indianness of the authentic production which makes it inaccessible—mystifying dance style, strange sounding music, unfamiliar character types, incomprehensible motivations—then transpose the play into a familiar Western setting and there will be no barrier to acceptance (Byrski). Let the characters be Europeans or Americans. Use familiar music and acting patterns drawn from our own theatrical traditions. We do *Hamlet* in modern dress and Greek tragedies to electronic music. Examples from popular culture are not hard to find either. *The Magnificent Seven*, starring Yul Brynner, is in every outward respect a shoot’em-up cowboy movie, while in fact, it is a Japanese *samurai* film transposed to the American West. Conversely, in Akira Kurosawa’s *Throne of Blood* there is no outward trace of the film’s English ancestry, yet it is a film of the Macbeth story. Of course, this approach is open to a director, but isn’t it rather like throwing out the baby with the bath? If there is nothing identifiably “Indian” about the performance, it seems like a lot of unnecessary trouble to study Sanskrit drama and theater in the first place (Richmond).

# Suggestions for Directors of Sanskrit Plays

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*Farley Richmond*

THE TRADITION of performing Sanskrit plays as they were originally presented in ancient India is dead and we may well mourn its passing, for the superb dramas of one of the world's richest cultures have been untimely committed to the reading shelf when their rightful place is on the stage. In the absence of a living model from which inspiration may be drawn, contemporary directors are faced with the formidable task of arriving at a production style which has unique Indian characteristics but which is understandable to audiences unfamiliar with the Indian milieu. The following account is meant to aid them in their search.

The scope of this chapter is confined to an exploration of performance areas and acting techniques suitable for such productions. Consequently, some important subjects have been excluded, for example, the procedures for the ritual consecration of the theater building and the stage described in the classical literature, the preliminary rituals preceding a performance, explanation of the aesthetic theory, discussion of the characteristic types and methods of constructing plays, and itemization of the qualifications of the "ideal" spectator in ancient times. It was thought better to concentrate only on the major topics related to practical decisions most directors must make in anticipation of a contemporary production. Since discussions of the history and uses of music in ancient times appear in several of the contributions in this volume, they have been excluded from examination here.

There are, first of all, the plays themselves, particularly their graphic stage directions, which provide broad hints as to the possible style of ancient staging. Unfortunately, we must use caution

where they are concerned. It has not yet been positively established who wrote the stage directions. Are they the work of the playwrights, or were they noted down in the manuscripts by stage managers during rehearsals, if there were any, to serve as guides to the actors, much as stage managers still do in the West? Or could the directions be the work of scribes who took the liberty of inserting them into the texts as an aid to the reading public of the day? In support of this latter possibility, it is well to remember that few editors of Shakespeare's plays ever resisted the temptation to insert directions into the texts not found in the original quarto and folio editions. Are the stage directions the work of several hands or the product of only one individual? Do they differ in the surviving recensions? Before we may conclude that they are authentic indications of staging practices in ancient times these and many more questions must be answered. Meanwhile, our task is to make sense of those indications that we have.

The most important dramaturgical text to survive from ancient times is the *Nāṭyaśāstra*,<sup>1</sup> the fountainhead of practically all knowledge concerning production practices in ancient India. Whatever conclusions are reached concerning ancient play production, one must inevitably come to grips with the evidence found in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Of slightly less importance to contemporary directors are Nandikeśvara's *Abhinayadarpaṇam* (*The Mirror of Gestures*)<sup>2</sup> and Dhanañjaya's *Daśarūpaka* (*Ten Forms of Drama*).<sup>3</sup> Both are narrower in scope and less voluminous than the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

Perhaps the most telling but inaccessible sources for understanding conventional staging practices in India are the many forms of traditional theater that survive in the rural areas of the country. Three forms in particular throw light on the conventions that were possibly practiced in ancient times. They are: Kūṭiyāṭtam, Kuchipudi and Aṅkīya Nāṭ. Numerous other forms of traditional theater, among them Yakshagāna, Jātra, Kathakali and Bhavāi, spreading across India's cultural landscape like a carpet of variegated colors, preserve conventional staging practices which may help a director in his search for visual and aural stimuli.<sup>4</sup>

Examination of selected productions of Sanskrit plays in modern India contribute an unusual perspective on the contemporary Indian interpretation of the whole body of dramatic literature. From time to time Sanskrit plays have been produced abroad by

foreign and Indian directors. Useful information may be gleaned from the reports of their efforts.<sup>4</sup>

## PERFORMANCE AREA

Although a wide variety of acting areas are potentially suitable for the production of Sanskrit plays, contemporary directors may find it useful to examine the sketchy details which remain of the ancient Indian stage. In this regard, focus may profitably be confined to several key questions: What was the juxtaposition of the audience and the actors? What was the size of the playing area and where were the entrances and exits? How was the playing space designed to be used? Answers to these questions may help to establish a visual picture, however incomplete, of the ancient Indian theater.

### *Physical Facilities in Ancient Times*

Regrettably, there are no surviving theater structures from the period in which the major plays were composed—no drawings or floor plans, not even the foundations of a building in ruins.<sup>5</sup> Our earliest and most extensive written evidence concerning the size, shape, and appearance of theater houses comes from chapter 2 of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Undoubtedly, the chapter contains invaluable details but caution is advised when considering the data as gospel. Bharata writes as though he were dictating rules for the construction of “ideal” models rather than describing existing structures. Much of the factual information is confusing and incomplete. Thus we are forced to rely almost entirely on a body of garbled evidence concerning buildings which may never have been constructed!

Of the several shapes and sizes of structures mentioned, Bharata calls special attention to the medium-sized rectangular building (*vikṛṣṭamadhya*) which he suggests is preferable to all the other structures mentioned in the text because the spectators could easily see the expressions on the faces of the actors and hear the speeches and songs.

Bharata specifies that the perimeter of the building should be 96' × 48' and subdivided in half,<sup>7</sup> forming two equal squares, one of which he relegates to the stage and dressing area and the other to the spectators. Given this basic information, we have the an-

swer to the first question posed. The juxtaposition of audience and actors in the Indian theater structure preferred by Bharata was frontal. The spectators sat at one end of a rectangular space and the actors performed before them at the other end. The structure was restricted in size owing to the aural and visual considerations cited by Bharata who implies a concern that the players be seen and heard without unnecessary strain on the eyes and ears of the spectators.

Given the limited area of 48' × 48' reserved for the spectators, it is apparent that relatively few people could witness the performance of a Sanskrit play at any one time. Perhaps no more than five hundred at the most, and possibly two hundred people comfortably seated, saw plays in the medium-sized rectangular theater houses. This obviously promoted an intimacy between actors and audience which was inconceivable in the classical theater structures of other ancient cultures, such as those of Greece and Rome. The Indian playhouses were considerably more intimate than those of Elizabethan England, which are thought to have held several thousand patrons.

Unfortunately, it is not so easy to arrive at a satisfactory answer to our next question. We know almost as little about the acting area of the ancient Indian theater as we do about that of Shakespeare's Globe or the Theatre Dionysus of Athens during the fifth century B.C. Several points are fairly certain, however. Bharata subdivides the space provided for the actors into two equal parts; half is reserved for the dressing room (*nepathyagṛha*) and the other half, the space between the spectators and the dressing room, is designated as the stage. The stage seems to have been on a different level from that on which the spectators sat; thus it was clearly demarcated as an acting area. Bharata says that the stage floor was to be as level as the surface of a mirror, not convex like the back of a turtle or a fish. The stage should also be a highly polished, reflective surface, like that of a dance floor. It had pillars, either to help support the superstructure of the main building or to support a separate roof above the stage; Bharata is unclear about the precise placement and function of the pillars. Two doors connected the stage with the dressing room, which presumes that a wall separated the two areas. The space upstage between the doors was designated as the proper place for the musicians. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* is silent on many other important details, however. It leaves us to

guess the height, shape, number, and placement of the stage pillars; the height and width of the stage doors; the shape of the stage roof, if there was one; and the placement of decorations.

In recent years considerable scholarly controversy has arisen over three Sanskrit terms used by Bharata in connection with the acting area. They are *mattavāraṇi*, *raṅgapīṭha* and *raṅgaśṛṣa*. Among the many interpretations given to *mattavāraṇi* by twentieth-century Sanskrit scholars the term has variously been defined as a line of intoxicated elephants which adorn the facade below the front of the stage; the elephants which support the bases of four pillars at the upstage center of the acting area; the verandas at the sides of the stage, equivalent to the down-right and down-left areas of a proscenium arch stage; areas adjacent to the right and left of the stage used for staging acts and scenes; and a four-pillared structure at the rear of the stage symbolically used to protect the theater and the performers from harm. Acceptance of either of the first two definitions as correct would pose no practical problems to a contemporary director, but acceptance of any of the last three views would affect the stage space and ultimately influence the way actors were to use it.

Controversies also surround the meaning of two other important terms used by Bharata in reference to the stage area. The following are summaries of the major divergent opinions. Ghosh believes that the acting area was 12' × 48' and that it was on one level. *Raṅgapīṭha* and *raṅgaśṛṣa* were used synonymously to describe it.<sup>8</sup> His argument is considerably weakened when one considers that the *Nāṭyaśāstra* specifies that the musicians sat upstage center and would have required at least four feet of stage depth for themselves and their instruments, thus reducing to only eight feet the amount of usable playing area between themselves and the front edge of the stage.

Raghavan and Rangacharya believe that the stage space was divided into two different levels. The lower level (*raṅgapīṭha*) was closer to the spectators than the upper level (*raṅgaśṛṣa*). Raghavan maintains that a curtain separated the two levels. The upstage center level measured 12' × 12'. It was here that the musicians sat and the actors "make offerings and *pūja* before the drama begins and wait during the drama when they have dressed themselves up."<sup>9</sup> At both sides of the upper level in front of the doors leading to the dressing room were areas measuring 12' × 18'; although



Raghavan neglects to mention their function it may be supposed that they were also appropriate as acting areas. The lower level was subdivided by the stage pillars into three separate units. The central unit, 12'  $\times$  24', seems to have been the principal acting space and he calls the 12'  $\times$  12' areas to the right and left of it the *mattavāraṇi*. Presumably these were also used by the actors for playing scenes.

Panchal<sup>10</sup> agrees with Raghavan insofar as the division of the stage into two levels is concerned, but he refers to the upper level as a platform (*vedikā*) on which the musicians sat. Contrary to Raghavan, he maintains that some scenes were played on this platform. In his conjectural elevations, Panchal places the stage doors closer to the center of the back wall than does any other scholar, presumably to indicate that the entrances of actors from the dressing room should not be obscured by the stage pillars.

Subba Rao thinks that the entire stage was known as the *raṅga-śrīṣa* and that it was divided into two levels; the upper level (12'  $\times$  48') was higher than the lower level (12'  $\times$  48'). In his elevations, he places the stage doors farther from the center of the stage than does Panchal or any other scholar who deals with the subject. If he is correct in his assumptions, this would have posed serious sight line problems for the spectators seated at the center of the house, since the pillars on the stage most probably would have masked the entrances and exits of the characters.

The general picture that emerges of the ancient Indian playing area, favored by Bharata and interpreted by contemporary scholars, is that of a rectangular shaped space no larger than 24'  $\times$  48' and perhaps as small as 12'  $\times$  18'. It may have been divided into two different levels of equal size; the upstage area being slightly raised above that downstage. The areas similar to the down-right and down-left stage positions on a proscenium arch stage, possibly demarcated by pillars and called *mattavāraṇi* by some scholars, may have been used as acting areas, thus extending the actual playing space to the maximum width of the building which was forty-eight feet. The amount of usable acting area upstage center may have been somewhat reduced owing to the presence of musicians between the two doors leading to the dressing room.

Given the garbled and uncorroborated evidence of the *Nāṭya-śāstra*, it seems unwise to construct a conjectural model of the ancient Indian playhouse.<sup>11</sup> Such an attempt, however fascinating,

may serve only to mislead the unsuspecting layman into believing that we are certain of the appearance of the Sanskrit theater, when in fact we are far from it.

Turning now to the use that may have been made of the stage, we begin to understand more fully the style of presentation appropriate to this space. In chapter 14, Bharata says that the stage was divided into different zones (*kakṣya*)<sup>12</sup> and that by walking around (*parikramaṇa*) from one zone to another the actor was understood to have moved from one place of action to another. Frequent use of this convention may be found in the surviving Sanskrit plays. In Act I of *Śakuntala*, for example, King Duṣyanta and his charioteer enter the stage in hot pursuit of an antelope. During the course of their chase they are persuaded by hermits to give up the hunt outside the confines of a hermitage in which the beast has taken refuge. Having been invited to enter the precincts in peace, the king commands his charioteer, "Urge the horses on. We will purify ourselves by viewing this sacred place." To which the charioteer responds accordingly by driving the chariot rapidly forward. According to the stage directions, the king "looks around" and observes:

It is evident, even without being told, that these are the precincts of a sacred grove.

The rice is strewn below the trees  
From hollow trunks that parrots fill;  
There lie the oily stones that serve  
To bruise the fruit of Ingudi;  
The antelopes, taught here to trust,  
Unstartled hear the human voice;  
And fountain paths are marked by lines  
Of falling drops from clothes of bark.

And see,

The rootlets of the trees are laved  
By waters tumbling in the breeze;  
Their budding splendor is obscured  
By smoke from sacrificial oil;  
And slowly the confiding fawns  
Roam near by on the well-mown lawns.<sup>13</sup>

In the space of a few moments, the physical locale changes from the outside to the inside of a forest hermitage. Only a few words, reinforced by symbolic actions, are needed to tell the spectators



1.

*Śakuntalā*, Act III. Prithvi Theatres, Bombay, 1944. The famous film and stage star, Prithvi Raj Kapoor as King Duṣyanta. Śakuntalā in the garden with two Maids who stand modestly apart from the lovers. Staged along Western realistic lines, with live trees and plants and a hut constructed in careful detail, following the influence of British theater. (Photo: Prithvi Raj Family Archives.)



2. *Śakuntalā*, Act III. Chinese Youth Theatre, Peking, 1957. King Duṣyanta with Śakuntalā in the garden. The trees, flowers, and deer are stylized scenic elements not called for in traditional Sanskrit practice. (Photo: Chinese Youth Theatre of Peking.)



3. *Śakuntala*, Act V. Hindustani Theatre, New Delhi, 1959. Directed by Narendra Sharma. The Hindustani Theatre was organized specifically to stage classical Sanskrit dramas in modern vernacular translation. Śakuntalā pleads with King Duṣyanta to recognize her, but he rejects her. An early production utilizing mime, song, and dance in a nonrealistic style. No settings, other than the single background, were used.
  
5. *The Little Clay Cart*, Act I. Hindustani Theatre, New Delhi, 1958. Directed by Habib Tanvir. Maitreya, the jester, mimes holding lamp in the palm of his upturned hand as he approaches. Vasanta senā "hides" by turning her back. Two servants watch their master. Saṁsthānaka, accost Radanikā, a maidservant. Performed on an open stage without scenery. Highly stylized costumes, by Shama Zaidi, were based on such regional theater models as Kathakali.

*The Pañcatantra*. Teatr Lalka, Warsaw, Poland, 1973. Directed by Julianna Cal-kowa. This children's production, although not of a classical Sanskrit play, is based on the ancient Pañcatantra fables of North India. The costume and makeup of the central figure are inspired by Kathakali. The use of undecorated, open stage space is similar to that of the Sanskrit theater. (Photo: Edward Hart-wig.)

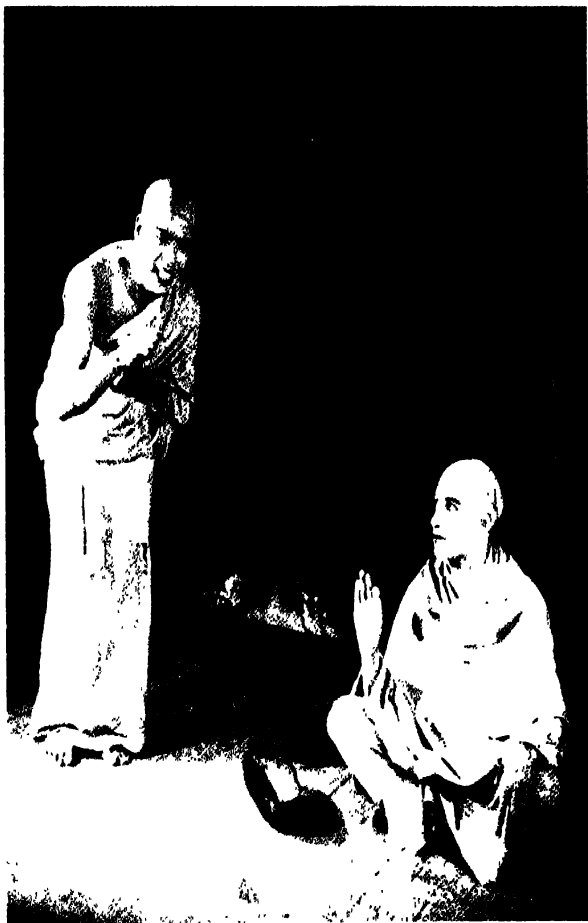




6. *The Priest and the Prostitute*, a one-act Sanskrit comedy. National School of Drama, New Delhi, 1960. The Messenger of Death stands over the Prostitute, while the Priest bashfully turns away from his gathered friends. The numerous painted stage settings representing gate, flowers, clouds, walls, seat, and fence reflect Western scenic traditions.



7. *The Priest and the Prostitute*. Performed in Sanskrit by Samskrita Ranga at the Museum Theatre, Madras, 1960. Directed by V Raghavan. The painted tree is reminiscent of European scenic tradition, but the simple placement of the figures on the open stage is in keeping with ancient Indian theater practice.





8. *The Vision of Vāsavadattā*, Act VI. Institute for Advanced Studies in the Theatre Arts, New York, 1963. Directed by Mrinalini Sarabhai. King Udayana (Reid Shelton) is reminded of his beloved Vāsavadattā as he plays the *vṇā*, while the jester Vasantaka (Harold Cherry) listens. The two figures and the bench are isolated in space, emphasizing the presence and the acting technique of the performers. Makeup and costuming are relatively natural and subdued. (Photo: Dolores Gudzin.)

10. *The Little Clay Cart*, Act I. University Theatre, University of Minnesota, 1966. Directed by Balwant Gargi. The villain Saṃsthānaka threatens the jester Maitreya. North Indian style costumes are simple and makeup emphasizes a single character trait—the villain's mustache, the Brahman's hooked nose, the female servant's forehead mark. (Photo: Balwant Gargi.)





9.

*The Little Clay Cart*, Act I. Penthouse Theatre, University of Washington, Seattle, 1965. Directed by Balwant Gargi. The jester Maitreya mimes raising a stick to threaten Samsthānaka's courtier. The frightened Samsthānaka uses a servant as a shield. Performed on an open stage without scenery. Costumes are based on North Indian dress. Action is deliberately stylized to create a vivid stage picture. (Photo: Balwant Gargi.)





*The Little Clay Cart*, Act III. Teatr Polski, Wrocław, Poland, 1971. Directed by Krystyna Skuszanka. The maid Radanikā (Lucja Burzyńska) wakes Maitreya (Erwin Nowiaszak), while the hero Cārudatta (Tadeusz Pokrzywko) sleeps. Deliberately plain costumes and makeup only hint at Indianness. The open stage space with isolated platforms identifies specific localities without imposing excess scenic values. A semicircular ramp against the cyclorama adds a playing area not utilized in ancient Indian theater; this spacial arrangement has been popular in Europe since the 1930s. (Photo: Grazyna Wyszomirska.)

where the characters are, where they are going and what they see along the way. Since this act contains several other locales in the hermitage, it seems unlikely that scenery and stage settings were used to establish each place.

However, we cannot totally ignore the possibility that scenery was used to indicate locale in the staging of some plays. In chapter 23, with reference to stage properties (*pusta*), Bharata classifies, among other things, tall mountains, temples, caves, aerial vehicles, and houses. He goes on to say that they "should be fashioned in cane frame and resemble the nature of the real object. These can be covered with cloth to make them appear exactly the same as the objects in reality."<sup>14</sup> Could it be that Bharata had in mind the use of scene pieces to symbolize a particular place? Is he referring to a convention of staging that closely resembles that used in medieval Europe, in which a variety of different places was symbolized by pieces of scenery and in which the stage was regarded as a neutral acting area (*platea*) until the actor identified himself in relation to the scenery? Substantive and conclusive evidence must be forthcoming before the issue can be resolved.

Bharata further elaborates on the symbolic use of the stage by suggesting that "those who have entered the stage first are to be regarded as 'being inside'; and those who entered afterward are to be understood as 'outside' the (particular) stage-zone."<sup>15</sup> For example, in *The Little Clay Cart* when the good-hearted thief Śarvilaka makes his entrance, he is taken to be outside the house of Cārudatta. Elsewhere on the stage Cārudatta and his friend Maitreya are asleep. Referring to the rules of kleptology, Śarvilaka proceeds to expand the chink in an imaginary wall that surrounds the compound, force his way through, and stealthily enter the room of the sleeping men. Again, it would seem that scenery or scene pieces are not required to show us where Śarvilaka is and what he is doing for he tells us step by step all the information we need to know to follow his actions.

Also in chapter 14, Bharata suggests that the stage doors may have been used in a conventional manner. Perhaps one was reserved only for entrances and the other only for exits, or perhaps they had symbolic significance much like the doors in the skene in ancient Greek theater. As though to permanently frustrate attempts to decipher his meaning, Bharata states that local usages prevailed for the doors.<sup>16</sup>

In summary, it seems likely that the stage was used in a highly

theatrical manner, with reliance on the words of a playwright and the physical movements of the actors to convey the appropriate environmental details and mood for the action, unencumbered by heavy and complicated scenery and technical effects. In this respect, ancient Indian staging resembles that stage said by some critics to have prevailed in ancient Greece and in Elizabethan England. It depended on the skill of the actors to realize the full potential of such a stage.

### *Temple Theaters of Kerala*

Perhaps the single most important development in recent years having direct bearing on our understanding of the production of Sanskrit plays in a traditional manner has been the emergence of a body of literature concerning Kūṭiyāṭṭam, a Sanskrit theater form preserved in some of the temples of Kerala. Historical evidence points to the existence of Kūṭiyāṭṭam at least as early as the tenth century A.D. when it is said to have been reformed.<sup>17</sup> Owing to the diligent work of Jones<sup>18</sup> and Panchal,<sup>19</sup> details regarding the size, shape, and function of the theater structures (*kūṭambalam*) in which portions of Sanskrit plays are still performed have become better known outside the region and the country in recent times. Much investigation has yet to be done before a true picture of the relationship between these remarkable buildings and those described by Bharata in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is established. However, modern directors may find it useful to have a general description of the buildings and particularly their stages and the uses which are made of them. The following account is based on my own personal investigations made in 1969–1970 and 1974–1975, aided by the published accounts of Jones and Panchal.

At least nine theater structures survive in the temples of North and South Central Kerala.<sup>20</sup> Two are in an advanced state of ruin and several others border on severe decay. Of the nine surviving temple theaters which I have visited, all share common features but each has many unique details that distinguish it from the others. All of the structures are rectangular in shape. The largest, most impressive and frequently used is that of the famous Vaṭakku-nāthan Temple at Trichur. Described as a veritable Kailāsa (the Himalayan mountain abode of Lord Śiva) of theaters, the interior of the building is 72' × 55'.<sup>21</sup> Next in size is that of the Irinjalakuda Temple which has an interior measuring approximately 67' × 54'.

Both structures are considerably larger than those of neighboring temples in and around Trichur or those in South Central Kerala. The interior of the smallest structure, that of the famous Kṛṣṇa Temple at Guruvāyūr, for example, is only about 32' × 24', permitting relatively few people to gather inside to witness Kūṭiyāṭṭam performances. The theater at the Vaṭakkunāthan Temple holds approximately two to five hundred spectators at any given time which makes it the only traditional theater structure in Kerala which approximates the size of the ideal rectangular model described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

The best place from which to see and hear a Kūṭiyāṭṭam performance in any of the theaters is the large open space in front of the stage. In some of the theaters this area is slightly raised and bordered by a row of pillars which support the high, central roof of the building. In the old days, this space was reserved exclusively for members of the upper castes, namely the Brahmins and the male members of local ruling families. Those of less prestigious communities were required to sit or stand in the aisles which border this space at the sides and back. In the Irīñjalakuda Temple theater the practice of segregation on the basis of caste is still evident.

The space reserved for the actors in the temple theaters of Kerala is considerably smaller and different in shape from the rectangular theaters (*vikṛṣṭamadhya*) described by Bharata. In the first place, the acting areas in all of the theaters that I have seen are square rather than rectangular. The largest of these is that at the Vaṭakkunāthan Temple which has a twenty-one-foot, four-inch square stage. The smallest acting area in a theater still in use is at Guruvāyūr and is nine feet, six inches square. The ideal playing space specified by Bharata in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* for square theaters (*caturaśramadhya*) with square stages is 12' × 12'.

All of the temple theaters in Kerala have stages that are raised approximately one foot above the audience area in front of the stage. This clearly separates spectators from actors. The front of the stage touches a point approximately half the distance of the total length of the building, conforming to the rules laid down in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* for the placement of the stage in the rectangular theater. Except for that at Vaṭakkunāthan Temple, with its twelve pillars arranged in groups of three, all of the stages I have seen are demarcated by four pillars which support a roof above the stage.

The underside of the stage roof in almost all of the theaters is ornately decorated with wooden carvings of scenes from epic literature, lotuses, and representations of the nine dieties (*dikpāla*) who preside over the playing area, symbolically protecting it and the actors from harm. Unfortunately, most of the labor of the artisans is lost to the spectators because there is little light in this area and layer upon layer of soot from the oil lamps have darkened the surface of the ceiling. Paintings adorn the underside of the stage roof as well as the theater hall at Guruvāyūr. Because the roofs above the raised stages in all of the theaters are low, the actors wearing their elaborate headdresses and costumes seem bigger than life. The pillars do not obstruct the action on stage for those seated in front of the stage, but for those seated or standing in the aisles at the sides the view is somewhat limited, especially when the actors dance or move in the center or upstage areas.

Owing to the aisles to the right and left of the stage creating a semicircular arrangement not unlike that found in some Western theaters, spectators may see the action from the sides. However, the actors do not perform as though it were important that they be seen by spectators seated at the sides. Instead, they perform as though they were playing for the benefit of spectators seated directly in the front of the stage. Besides the fact that the only source of illumination on stage is an oil lamp down center, it is well to remember that ritual is one of the chief motivations for performing in this direction. Housed in the sanctum sanctorum of the temple compound is the chief diety who faces the stage. It is in honor of the temple diety that the actors play. Thus, *Kūṭiyāṭṭam* has been designed as a frontal art form for religious as well as practical reasons.

The dressing area in all of the theater structures is adjacent to the rear of the stage and considerably smaller than the acting area. In some theaters it is so tiny that it is practically useless as a place for the actors to apply their complicated makeup and costumes. Separating the dressing area from the stage is a wall with two doors. The doors are located in a similar position to the up-left and up-right positions on a proscenium arch stage. According to convention, the up-left door serves as the place for entrances and the up-right door is reserved for exits.<sup>22</sup>

The size of the acting area is somewhat reduced by the presence of musicians. Two large drums (*mizhāvu*) are located between the

two doors, providing space permits; otherwise, they are placed downstage overlapping the doors. The drums used at the Vaṭakku-nāthan Temple theater, the largest structure of its kind, take up so much room that they prevent the spectators from having a clear view of the characters who enter and exit from the dressing room. To the right of the drummers, facing stage left, sit the cymbal (*kuzhittalam*) players. Standing to the left of the seated drummers are the minor instrumentalists—a musician who plays a small hourglass drum (*iḍakka*), and another who plays an oboelike instrument (*kuzhal*) and the conch shell (*śankhu*).

The surface of the stage floor, in all but a few of these theaters, is convex (resembling the back of a tortoise) in that it is slightly higher in the center than it is at its extremities. Thus it is constructed in direct contradiction to the rules laid down in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. In temples where care is taken to maintain the appearance of the theater, the surface of the stage is slick and shiny to facilitate dancing.

Generally speaking, the down-center position of the stage is most frequently used by the actors, as previously mentioned, principally because it is near the spectators and close to the only source of illumination. An invisible corridor between the lamp and the drummers serves as the major acting area. The actors almost never use the areas to the left and right of this corridor except when more than one character is on the stage at one time, in which case they play on approximately the same level slightly to the right and left of the corridor and facing the front.

Furniture is restricted to a simple stool which serves as a throne, a mountain peak, a cane chair, or whatever the actor establishes it to represent through the dialogue. Whenever several characters are required to sit, additional stools are brought by the actors or stage attendants.

Scenery has no place in the Kūṭiyāṭṭam theaters. The actors conjure up the place and time of the action through their words, gestures, and movements. The stage then becomes a neutral platform that can represent any place that the script demands. Through conventional patterns of movement the actors convey the idea that they have traversed from one physical locale to another. In this respect, they use the stage in a manner identical to that described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

The general picture that emerges of the Kerala temple theater is

that of a rectangular building with a square stage surrounded on three sides by an audience area. The statistics concerning the size of the building and that of the stage differ from structure to structure but one fact is clear—none of the theaters duplicate the dimensions described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* as being ideal for either the rectangular or the square theater or stage. The acting area is raised higher than the area on which the spectators sit or stand. Pillars demarcate the extremities of the stage and support a stage roof the underside of which is richly ornamented. Two doors divide the stage from the dressing space which is small and ill-designed for the purposes for which it was intended. Musicians seated and standing upstage of the actors often mask entrances and exits of characters and reduce the usable acting area. Like the staging conventions mentioned in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, those of Kuṭiyāṭṭam emphasize the theatrical, nonillusionistic nature of the stage and place maximum focus on the actors and the words of the text.

### *Contemporary Experiments*

In recent years, notable attempts have been made to revive an interest in Sanskrit drama. These attempts have arisen to meet educational objectives, such as the reinforcement of Sanskrit language and literature studies in schools and colleges, and to make this branch of classical learning more palatable to students who have lost contact with the roots of their culture. The Brahman Sabha of Bombay, the Music Academy of Madras, Rabindra Bharati University of Calcutta, and Banaras Hindu University of Varanasi, among other distinguished centers of Sanskrit learning, have struggled to mount productions of classical Sanskrit plays for the edification of students and the entertainment of the public at large. Some of the leading directors of amateur and semiprofessional theater groups throughout the country have also tried their hand at regional-language translations and adaptations of Sanskrit plays. Notable examples are Sombhu Mitra's Bengali adaptation of *The Minister's Seal* produced in Calcutta, and Vijaya Mehta's Marathi version of the same play performed in Bombay; Hindi versions of *Śakuntala* and *The Little Clay Cart*, produced in New Delhi by Ebrahim Alkazi, director of the National School of Drama; and Habib Tanvir's Hindi interpretation of *The Little Clay Cart* and *The Hero and the Nymph*, produced in New Delhi. Also, an annual



conference on Sanskrit drama has been sponsored in Ujjain for many years now in which the productions of invited groups from throughout the subcontinent have been a major attraction.

In general, productions such as these follow a similar pattern. The proscenium arch stage becomes the place of performance. Most of the works have employed scenery, often to elaborate extremes, to establish place and time rather than relying on the words of the author and conventionalized patterns of movement to awaken the imagination of the spectators. Entrances and exits are not conventionalized, nor are attempts made to build doors up-stage left and right to conform to techniques stated in the *Nāṭya-śāstra*. Electric lights, dimmers, and front curtains have been freely accepted by producers as standard stage equipment. Although the actors frequently break into song and address their emotions directly to the audience, the acting style in most of the attempts may be described as realistic. In other words, producers have followed nineteenth- and twentieth-century trends which are commonly practiced for staging Western plays and regional-language plays in urban India.

Diverse attempts have also been made to reinterpret the more famous Sanskrit plays through the medium of dance. Rukmini Devi's Kalakshetra in Adyar, Maya Rao's Natya Institute of Choreography in New Delhi, and Mrinalani Sarabhai's Darpana Academy in Ahmedabad are among the institutions that have developed dance versions of Sanskrit plays. Charming though these dance works often are, they do not grow out of a desire to revive Sanskrit drama or theater.

### *Suggested Approaches*

Given the scanty information about the practices of play production in ancient India, those still preserved in Kūṭiyāṭṭam, and the attempts to produce Sanskrit plays by modern directors in urban areas, what then are some of the avenues of approach open to modern directors wishing to stage Sanskrit plays? To begin with, I would suggest that the usual factors that influence play production in any country or situation still have a direct bearing on the choices that one makes. What play is best to produce? For whom is the work intended? Why produce the play? What are the built-in limitations of the production situation aside from those inherent within the script? These and many other questions must be an-

swered before a suitable performance area may be selected and designed.

From all the information that has been presented thus far, it would appear that a frontal juxtaposition of audience and actors is entirely appropriate for the production of Sanskrit plays. Therefore, a proscenium arch stage is suitable as a playing space. The only danger that I can see is that contemporary directors and designers may wish to provide a variety of scenic backgrounds and audiences familiar with proscenium staging may expect to see scenic displays. To develop a production on a proscenium arch stage that is not cluttered, I would suggest building walls from flats to mask the backstage area, limiting the acting area, and providing doors up left and up right. This would be the simplest arrangement possible. Should this approach be chosen I would then urge that the decor be simple and uncluttered. Paintings or bas-relief sculpture suggested in the model in H. W. Wells' *Six Sanskrit Plays* strike me as being too ornate, distracting from the essential point of focus which ought to be the actors.

A second possibility would be to build an adaptation of a Kerala temple theater stage and place it either on a proscenium arch stage or in an arena theater. This structure should have four pillars supporting a stage roof and two doors leading to a dressing room constructed at the rear of the edifice. I would seat the spectators on all three sides according to the Kerala practice, and probably they ought to be seated on the floor as is customary there. This solution has the advantage of providing the designers a great deal more responsibility and artistic input into the overall production. It also provides a taste of traditional Indian theater without actually resorting to the construction of scenic backgrounds. The disadvantages are obvious; the high cost in man-hours and money are far in excess of the first approach articulated above.

A third alternative takes its cue from conventional staging techniques mentioned in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and some of the practices of Kūṭiyāṭṭam. In this case, the site of the production might be either an arena or three-quarter round stage. Audiences who see plays in both spaces do not expect to see elaborate scenery, but they do expect to sit near to the acting area. Conventional movements, such as walking around to suggest movement from one symbolic locale to another, would be well suited to both stage spaces.

Although rare in the urban areas, three-quarter round and

arena staging techniques are well known in village India. In performances that I have seen of Kuchipudi, Yakshagāna, Jātra, and Bhavāi the playing areas out of doors are demarcated by posts placed at the four corners of an acting area. One side of the area is used by the musicians. The actors enter and exit to their left and the spectators sit on the ground on all four sides, even though the performances seem to have been designed to be presented frontally.<sup>23</sup> Scenery is not used as an element of the production in the village theater forms. Therefore, I would suggest that a Sanskrit play produced in this fashion would be quite acceptable. In such a production all attention must be focused on the actors, costumes, music, and dance.

A fourth alternative is to produce a Sanskrit play either on a proscenium, three-quarter round, or arena stage using scene pieces to suggest locale but limiting them to the barest essentials. This was attempted rather successfully by Morgan and Lewisohn in the 1924 production of *The Little Clay Cart* at the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York,<sup>24</sup> by Balwant Gargi in his 1966 production of the same play at the University of Minnesota,<sup>25</sup> and by me in an adaptation of the play at Michigan State University in 1976. Platforms, carefully selected scene pieces, props, and furniture were all woven into a visual montage that suggested Indian motifs, such as miniature painting and folk theater forms, and yet stayed just this side of being excessive and complicated. The 1924 production was initially designed for a proscenium arch stage and the 1966 show was originally staged in an arena at the University of Washington, Seattle, and redesigned for a proscenium arch stage in Minneapolis. My version was designed by Jon Gillespie, a talented theater student, who blended the four permanent pillars of our Arena Theatre into a simple architectural unit inspired by photographs of the interiors of the Jain temples at Mount Abu.

Regarding the use of light to illuminate the actors and the stage, it seems certain that oil lamps or torches were used in the ancient Indian theater, just as a large oil lamp is still used in some traditional Kūṭiyāṭṭam performances. However, in accordance with contemporary fire regulations, open flames may be prohibited. Should a modern director wish to produce a Sanskrit play using oil lamps or torch light, an alternative would be to perform outdoors or to seek permission to use open flames indoors. In a production of *Śūrpaṇakhā*, or the Amorous Demoness, Act II of the Kūṭiyāṭ-

tam version of the *Wonderful Crest Jewel* produced at Michigan State University in the spring of 1976, late afternoon sunlight coupled with oil lamps served as the major sources of illumination. A large grassy field between two knolls on the campus of the university was chosen as the playing area.<sup>26</sup> When the weather became too cool to perform out of doors we played in our Arena Theatre which has a ten-foot high ceiling. Our efforts were somewhat marred when the smoke produced by the lamps became so thick that it was irritating to the spectators. We also risked covering the ceiling and the lighting instruments with a heavy residue of soot. Needless to say, audiences and actors much preferred the production when it was outdoors. Presuming that modern lighting facilities are available, I suspect that contemporary directors will use these facilities with discretion, bearing in mind the style of the production envisioned.

## ACTING

The opening verse of Nandikeśvara's dramaturgical text *The Mirror of Gestures (Abhinayadarpaṇam)* is a beautiful salutation attributing the four elements which make up the art of acting (*abhinaya*) to Lord Śiva, the god of dance and destruction: "We bow to Śiva, to whom the whole world is the movement of his body, all sound his speech, the moon and the stars his ornaments, embodiment of sentiment and emotion."<sup>27</sup> Nandikeśvara rearranges the four elements that Bharata first established in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and presents them in the following order: Bodily movement (*aṅgika*), voice (*vācika*), properties, ornaments, costumes, and makeup (*āhārya*), and sentiment or emotion (*sāttvika*). Which of these is more important and to what extent they were blended together to form a unified style of theatrical presentation in ancient India, must now be determined. For convenience sake, they will be considered in the order that Nandikeśvara discusses them.

### *Bodily Movement*

Of the four categories which constitute the art of acting discussed in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, this is presented in the most detail. Bharata devotes five lengthy chapters to a comprehensive survey of bodily movement. Perhaps he meant to imply, in effect, that bodily movement is the most important component of acting. Unfortunately,

the chapters that deal with the subject are only written descriptions, unaided by visual illustrations. Nowhere in the work does Bharata make clear whether his discussion applies equally to the three allied yet distinct modes of entertainment—pure dance (*nr̥tta*), pantomimic dance (*nr̥tya*), and drama (*nat̥ya*). Nor are we sure to what extent dance movements are combined with natural movements in the drama, which he uses as a generic term to encompass dance drama, literary drama, and musical drama.

Bhat goes only so far as to say that “the close association of dramatic presentation and dance appears to be quite certain.”<sup>28</sup> Kale rightly observes that “most of these postures, gestures and movements [described in the *Nat̥yaśāstra*] are what is known today as dance gestures and movement.”<sup>29</sup> However, like Bhat he is not overly optimistic that dance and drama are to be regarded as one and the same thing, for, he says, “it is hard to visualize the enactment of a Sanskrit play entirely through these movements and gestures.”<sup>30</sup>

How then is a contemporary director to pinpoint a style of bodily movement appropriate for his actors to use in performing Sanskrit plays? Perhaps the traditional forms of theater which survive in various regions of India provide an answer. In Kuchipudi of Andhra State, for example, pure dance, dance with symbolic meaning, and a realistic style of acting are blended together into the fabric of performances that glorify the Vaiṣṇava philosophy of devotion (*bhakti*). At times the players perform items which can only be described as pure dance, that is, in which conventional patterns of footwork are combined with gestures which have no narrative meaning. These items are commonly used when a character makes his first entrance into the playing area. If anything, they are abstract gems woven throughout an all-night performance simply to glorify the beauty of the human body in space and to testify to the skill of the dancer who executes them in the appropriate rhythm. We may well wonder if there were similar provisions in ancient India for the entrances of characters like Duṣyanta, Śakuntalā, Cārudatta and Vasantasenā. According to Raghavan there were special songs (*dhruva*) in Prakrit, composed by the stage musicians, for the entrance and exit of characters, but we are not sure if the actors danced when these songs were sung.<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately, the *Nat̥yaśāstra* does not provide us with a clear picture of the stage movements which accompanied the music.

Kuchipudi actors embellish the dramatic text with what they call *abhinaya*, that is, in a language of gestures with symbolic meaning accompanied by songs rendered in *rāga* form by the chief musician. For example, as Satyabhāmā, Lord Kṛṣṇa's beloved consort, writes a love letter to express her longing, she uses her left hand to symbolize a palm leaf and the thumb and little finger of her right hand are extended to symbolize a stylus. As the musicians sing a *rāga* suited to accent the sentiment of love (*śṛṅgāra rasa*) the actor conveys the content of the message using the conventional gesture language (*mudrā*) peculiar to Kuchipudi. Interpreted from a Western point of view this technique resembles a pantomime accompanied by music.

The *abhinaya* of Kuchipudi may be appreciated on at least two levels. On a purely literal level the combination of gestures clearly conveys the idea that the character is composing a letter. On a deeper aesthetic level the actor heightens the moment of passion through the eye movements which express Satyabhāmā's extreme longing, the display of desire on the lips, the sense of shyness about committing such strong feelings to print, all of which symbolize Satyabhāmā's intense love for Kṛṣṇa, who is not only understood to be her lover in the context of this moment, but also her god, the object of religious devotion.

The *abhinaya* used during this segment of Kuchipudi play brings to mind Bharata's suggestion that "even a few gestures when combined with the proper colour of the face will double their charm, just as the moon will enhance the charm of the night."<sup>32</sup> This is good advice to actors in any theater form, particularly in those which depend on conventional techniques to convey meaning. Vedanta Satyanarayana Sharma, one of the few great Kuchipudi actors who still performs the role of Satyabhāmā, amply testifies to the truth of Bharata's advice.<sup>33</sup>

The actors of Kuchipudi also employ what may be described as realistic gestures when delivering the sections of dialogue in the plays, principally to intensify and punctuate a character's feelings. The gestures strike me as somewhat inconsistent with the actions of the more conventional segments of the plays, but nevertheless they are very much a part of the total style which is known as Kuchipudi.

In chapter 11, Bharata speaks of *cārī* movements which refer to specific poses and/or the physical reactions of actors. He cites ex-

amples of such actions as shooting an arrow, riding a chariot, and holding the reins of a horse. There are also stage directions in most of the plays which might be classified as *cārī*. Directions such as "thinking," "gazing," "whispering," "reflecting," "blushing," "laughing," "weeping," and "sighing" occur over and over again. Details for acting these directions in a conventional manner are lost, unfortunately.

In chapter 13, Bharata discusses at some length the gaits (*gati*) which are appropriate for various characters, depending on their sex, rank, age, and mood. One of Bharata's best examples of a gait is that appropriate for either a blind man or a person walking in the dark. He suggests that the "actor's feet glide over the ground and hands grope for the way."<sup>34</sup> Descriptions such as this remind me of the conventional movements typically found in the Peking Opera of China. In it one finds excellent examples of conventional patterns of movement reminiscent of the *cārī* and *gati* of India. The actor of the traditional Peking Opera preserved in Taiwan uses conventional poses and gaits which are appropriate to the particular type of character being portrayed. Interestingly, the major categories of character types in Peking Opera parallel those outlined in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The male characters (*sheng*) and female characters (*tan*) correspond to the heroic male roles (*nāyaka*) and female roles (*nāyikā*) of Sanskrit drama. The major supporting male roles (*ch'ing*) may be compared with the various ministers and officials of subsidiary court rank in the Sanskrit plays. And the clown (*ch'ou*) in Peking Opera finds his counterpart in the jester (*vidūṣaka*) who in Sanskrit theater often assumes a significant role because he often serves as advisor to and close associate of the king. Each of the major categories of characters in both the Peking Opera and the Sanskrit drama is further subdivided depending on age, rank, and temperament. Given the close parallel between the Peking Opera character types and those of the Sanskrit drama, it seems reasonable to speculate that the extensive stylization of poses and gaits in Peking Opera may have been similarly handled in the Sanskrit productions. In any case, an experimental production of a Sanskrit play in which the techniques of the Peking Opera are used as a source of inspiration would not be totally out of keeping with the spirit of Sanskrit theater practices.<sup>35</sup>

To my mind the heroic characters of Kathakali are useful in providing an indication of the bearing that an actor ought to have

when playing the male roles in Sanskrit plays. Characters like Naḷa, Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, and Arjuna in Kathakali plays have a dignity about them that captures the proper blend of the heroic (*vīra*) and the romantic (*śṛṅgāra*) sentiments. They personify righteousness (*dharma*) which is the expected idealized characteristic of heroes in Sanskrit plays. In contrast, the male characters of the Kuchipudi appear to me to be played as shallow, puffed up shells of masculinity, rather than the embodiment of it. On the other hand, the female characters of Kuchipudi are acted in a far more refined manner than are their counterparts in Kathakali. I much prefer them as models for contemporary actresses interested in capturing the stage presence of the heroines of Sanskrit plays. Perhaps this is explained by the tremendous emphasis of female (*lāsya*) dance movements and the sentiment of love (*śṛṅgāra rasa*) in Kuchipudi, in contrast to Kathakali's heavy reliance on male (*tāṇḍava*) dance movements and the sentiments of heroism (*vīra*) and rage (*raudra*).

I have purposely left Kūṭiyāṭṭam for last in this discussion because it seems to me, after having witnessed a few performances, spending nearly a year studying the art form, and producing an adaptation of a Kūṭiyāṭṭam play in the United States, that the bodily movements in it are too demanding for the actors to be practically useful in the performance of Sanskrit plays today. Years of intensive training and education at the feet of a skilled teacher are demanded of a Kūṭiyāṭṭam actor before he may be said to have perfected the art. After ten years of daily exercise and training, my own teacher is barely at the threshold of his career in the service of this temple art form. It is not a form of theater that may be learned and practiced in a short time. How then can Western actors ever hope to master the techniques sufficiently well to produce a full-length Sanskrit play in this style given the limited rehearsal time devoted to most productions?

The characters in Kūṭiyāṭṭam spend much of their stage time articulating the text of a play through an elaborate, symbolic gesture language. First the actor chants a verse or bit of dialogue in a stylized manner, rendering each word in gesture. Next he repeats the whole pattern without the words, accompanied only by the drums. This portion is deliberately prolonged to allow the actor time to emphasize the appropriate facial expressions. Finally, in a traditional performance, the actor repeats the segment once more, speaking the lines slowly and rendering the appropriate gestures



for each word to make quite clear that the spectators have understood the meaning. This process often makes for exciting moments of acting. But, paralleling the slow pace of the Japanese Nō, it plays havoc with the story line and the dramatic action. Focus is shifted from the play to the actor's performance which can produce deadly dull results unless the performer is a brilliant craftsman and imaginative artist.

Without a thorough knowledge of either the meaning of each gesture, or of Sanskrit, or of both, the uninitiated spectator is totally lost when watching a Kūṭiyāṭṭam performance. It is no wonder that the art form has reached such a serious state of decline in recent years, facing sure extinction unless something can be done to forge a place for it as an acceptable form of artistic communication in modern India.

### *Voice*

Bharata confines his discussion of voice (*vācika*) to five short chapters beginning with chapter 15. A good part of his initial remarks are devoted to linguistic considerations rather than to oral interpretations. Rangacharya takes this to be an unnecessary digression whereas Kale argues that Bharata's preoccupation with grammar and language makes sense. Kale reasons that "recitation of verses, thus was looked upon as the most important factor of oral interpretation. An acquaintance with the rules of prosody was needed for the proper recitation. The rules of prosody and a classification of the various meters and their description occupy the author a great deal accordingly."<sup>36</sup> Bharata's discussion of Sanskrit grammar and language need not concern us here. It is important to note, however, that characters were distinguished, one from another, by the language which they spoke. From a practical point of view, this permitted the spectators to easily identify one character type from the other. For example, the heroic characters speak Sanskrit and only on special occasions resort to Prakrit, a language which H. H. Wilson characterizes as emphasizing softer sounds than Sanskrit.<sup>37</sup> Bharata says that ordinary characters speak natural languages which fall into one of two categories; regional languages spoken by inhabitants of the various parts of the country, and dialects spoken by tribals and foreigners. Bharata suggests that different regional languages and dialects were suitable to characters depending on their rank and temperament. Women and

inferior characters were to use Prakrit dialects, except for the courtesans who might on occasion converse in Sanskrit, as Vasantasena does in *The Little Clay Cart*. In his footnotes to the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Ghosh cites numerous examples of the different languages used by characters, with special attention paid to *The Little Clay Cart*, perhaps because it contains characters who employ an unusually wide variety of regional languages and dialects.

Bharata provides detailed examples of the various modes of address that are proper for people of the same or different stations in life. For the most part, Sanskrit plays are written in prose dialogue with Sanskrit verses abounding throughout. Wilson cites at least eleven different meters used by Kālidāsa in the first thirty-five stanzas of *Śakuntala*, demonstrating how varied was the use of meter in Sanskrit drama.

Given the richness of the language and its importance to character delineation in the original, how can today's actors performing in languages other than Sanskrit preserve the subtle distinctions among the characters intended by the original Sanskrit versions? Does the director of an American production of *The Little Clay Cart* have the parasite (*viṭa*) speak with a Brooklyn accent and the hero speak as though he went to finishing school? While this may charm New York audiences, it does not help much to promote a better understanding of the unique interrelationship of the characters in Sanskrit plays. Perhaps the solution to this problem lies in assigning characters various stylized vocal patterns. This is the technique incorporated in the Kūṭiyāṭṭam.

Rajagopalan's excellent article on the spoken music of Kūṭiyāṭṭam calls special attention to the unusual patterns in which the Sanskrit verses and dialogues are chanted by Kūṭiyāṭṭam actors.<sup>34</sup> Speaking as a layman, I have observed that all the heroic characters use a slow, deliberate, and measured pace in reciting their verses and dialogue except when they are angered, in which case the tempo increases and the speech is more forcefully delivered. Rajagopalan characterizes the sound patterns as being similar to those used by priests to chant the *Sāmaveda*. He points out that there are different notes (*svara*) which are appropriate for a character according to his rank and station. To the untrained ear, the distinctions are imperceptible, but to the critical, the slightest deviation from the prescribed pattern becomes a glaring fault. Although not identical, the chanting of the actors reminds me of the

measured pace and tonal quality of the actors of Nō plays in Japan. Any director who wishes to experience the mood and pace of Kūṭiyāṭṭam is advised to listen to recordings of Nō plays.<sup>39</sup>

In contrast to the dignified manner of speaking which is cultivated by the heroic characters of Kūṭiyāṭṭam, the jester (*vidūṣaka*) speaks at a faster clip; he is glib, prosaic, at times almost "prattling." He delivers his own lines first in Prakrit, then in Sanskrit, and finally expands upon their meaning in Malayāḷam, the local language of the audience. In scenes between the hero and the jester, there is yet another procedure. In Act V, verse 4 of *The Vision of Vāsavadattā*, for example, the hero first chants the entire verse slowly in Sanskrit. Then he chants it again, a word or phrase at a time. When he pauses between the words or phrases, the jester repeats what has been said in Sanskrit; then, in Malayāḷam, he explores its implications and meaning, making comments on it in an improvised fashion for the edification of the spectators, most of whom understand only Malayāḷam. His wit and wisdom are legendary in Kerala. Perhaps this explains why he has now assumed a dominant place in many Kūṭiyāṭṭam performances in Kerala today.

In most of the modern Sanskrit productions that are produced in India, the verses are sung rather than chanted and musical instruments are used to accompany the actors. The verses are set to *rāga* and *tāla* which conform to the mood of the passages. This practice has become the principal style of acting Sanskrit plays in Madras, Bombay, Calcutta, and Delhi, although there is no clear evidence in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* to support it. Contrary to the vast majority of scholars and directors who approve of this practice, Kale contends that "metrical rhythm and tempo and not melodic rhythm and tempo, are to be observed in the recitation of Sanskrit verses. This factor is noteworthy because in the post-independence revival of Sanskrit drama in modern India [and here I take it he refers to the productions of Sanskrit plays in Bombay and Poona] the actors sing the verses in the melodic patterns of musical *rāga*. The erroneous nature of this practice is made clear by the rules of oral interpretation laid down by Bharata."<sup>40</sup>

### *Properties, Costumes, Makeup, and "Creatures"*

Chapter 23 of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* concerns the elements of spectacle. Bharata divides the subject into four parts—stage properties

(*pusta*), decorations (*alamkāra*), makeup (*aṅgaracana*), and “creatures” (*sañjīva*). More attention is lavished on the last three than on the first, but let us consider them in the order that Bharata presents them.

We learn that objects used in reality were not appropriate for the stage and that specialists should be employed to construct them. Of weaponry Bharata says, “no one should actually hit anyone on the stage. It should be done by token or symbol. Otherwise the weapon, fashioned thus through art and deceit, would break into pieces.”<sup>41</sup> From this comment we may conclude two things. First, fight scenes were most probably staged as choreographed dances, perhaps in the same manner as those executed in Kathakali or Yakshagāna in which special patterns of movements, accompanied by percussion instruments, are executed by the actors depending upon who the opponents are and whether they are equally matched. In both Kathakali and Yakshagāna fights are staged in circular patterns and have several levels of intensity and physical contact which are too complicated to describe here. Suffice it to say that Bharata’s statement provides ample justification for adapting the fight sequences from traditional village theater forms. Second, the statement tells us that theatrical props are based on reality but do not counterfeit it. If anything, props are executed in an artful manner, a point which Bharata reemphasizes in his discussion of costumes.

We also learn in Bharata’s brief exploration of this subject that great care was to be taken in the construction of properties, particularly Indra’s banner pole (*jarjara*) which was used in connection with the preliminary rituals to symbolize the gods’ protection of the performance. Although it is not mentioned in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, we learn from references in the stage directions of the plays that the jester should carry a crooked stick. The possible size and shape of this hand prop may be similar to that illustrated in Banda Kana-kalingashwara Rao’s brief article surveying Kuchipudi.<sup>42</sup>

In a theater such as this, where great imagination is demanded of the spectators, a simple stool covered with colored cloth may easily become a throne, as it does in Kathakali and Aṅkīya Nāṭ performances. A bench covered with a colored cloth can symbolize a bed, a swing, or a garden bench, as it does in Yakshagāna. Most certainly period furniture or props have no place in the Sanskrit theater of ancient times.

Bharata classifies other items under the category of properties which are obviously much larger than hand props or furniture. They are the tall mountains, temples, caves, idols of deities, elephants and horses, aerial vehicles, and houses mentioned earlier in connection with the possible incorporation of scene pieces which may have served the purpose of defining locale. Bharata's specifications are that these objects be "fashioned in cane frame" and "covered with cloth." This suggests two possible methods of construction. The first is that these props were made of frames shaped to resemble the things depicted and afterwards the frames were wrapped with cloth. Props constructed in this manner abound in the Nō theater. The second possibility is that they were created by cloth stretched over cane frames and painted to resemble the object. Such props are widely in use in the Aṅkīyā Nāṭ. Effigies (*chō* in Assamese and *pusta* in Sanskrit)<sup>43</sup> and masks (*mukha*) in the shape of animals, birds, serpents, demons, and carts are wrought by traditional craftsmen out of wicker frames over which cloth is stretched and painted to suggest rather than counterfeit the actual appearance of the object.

Bharata's use of the term "houses" suggests that this is one of the larger items to be made in this fashion. In Aṅkīyā Nāṭ, houses made of frames and wood covered with painted cloth are placed at the extreme corners of the prayer hall where the plays are performed to symbolize palaces, gardens, temples, and so forth. Could they be surviving examples of the houses to which Bharata refers? And were they used in association with the zones (*kakṣya*) that Bharata suggests were symbolic areas of the stage? Bhat, in his paper on "Bhāsa's Stage," definitely thinks that scene pieces with symbolic significance could have been used in ancient times and he cites examples from key scenes of Bhāsa's major works to show how this might have been accomplished.<sup>44</sup>

From the stage directions we learn that characters sometimes enter "seated" or "lying down." How could this have been achieved on the Sanskrit stage? The Kathakali artists have developed a splendid solution. An actor enters the playing area behind a curtain held by two attendants; he sits or lies wherever necessary; then the curtain is removed and the actor makes an entrance "seated" or "lying down." Panchal<sup>45</sup> argues in favor of an elaborate system of curtains hanging from ropes to mask the actors before or after a scene and to hide the musicians from the spectators.

through the first parts of the preliminary rituals. After reflecting on the flexibility of a single curtain held by two attendants, I find Panchal's suggestion seems unnecessarily complicated. A simple curtain might also have been used for other purposes besides dramatic entrances and conclusions to scenes. For example, it could have been used to symbolize bushes or shrubs behind which an actor playing a lover might conceal himself from his beloved.

Based on evidence in the stage directions, it is entirely possible that curtains hung over the stage doors. It is said that actors made entrances "tossing aside the curtain." The Nō theater and the Peking Opera<sup>46</sup> both have curtained doorways which are used to great effect. I recommend that directors explore these theater forms for ideas. If curtains over the doors were used in ancient India, I suspect that actors developed special techniques for using them which aided in establishing the mood and temperament of the characters they portrayed.

By decorations (*alamkāra*), Bharata means the garlands, body ornaments, and costumes of the actors. He offers suggestions for decorating both men and women according to the region of the country from which they come, their caste, station in life, and the occasion of their appearance on the stage, whether auspicious or inauspicious. From the tops of their heads to the tips of their toes the actors of Sanskrit theater were to be profusely and brilliantly ornamented and costumed: As a practical suggestion, Bharata advises against wearing ornaments made of real metal or precious stones because the actors are bound to tire under their weight and thus spoil the performance. Instead, he advises them to wear ornaments made of light wood glazed with shellac (*lac*) which counterfeited the real object.

Bharata's information concerning costumes and ornaments raises an interesting possibility. Were costumes and ornaments to be used as conventional symbols of the character types, for example, a king, a minister, a clown, and so forth? Or were they to approximate the formal and casual dress either of the time in which the plays were written or the time in which the characters lived? In other words, were the decorations to be conventional or historically accurate? Resolution of this question is of particular importance to contemporary directors concerned with reconstructing a historically accurate production.

Among India's traditional forms of theater there are two broad

tendencies. The first tendency is for the actors to wear conventional costumes which have symbolic meaning. The other is to permit the actors to wear modern dress of the region in which they perform, with the addition of one or two minor items of wearing apparel which symbolize the age, rank, and station of their character. Among those that use conventional dress, Kūṭiyāṭṭam serves as a typical example. Kūṭiyāṭṭam actors wear costumes with traditional designs, colors, and cuts. Details regarding each item of apparel and the way in which it is to be worn have been codified according to character and passed down from generation to generation. Many of the details have been set down in guides to performance practices written centuries ago (*kramadīpikā* and *aṭṭapra-kāra*) and preserved by the few families of actors who still perform the art in Kerala. The conventional costume appropriate for all kings in the Kūṭiyāṭṭam repertory consists of a large wooden crown (*kirīṭam*), chest, shoulder, forearm, wrist, and waist ornaments, a red and black striped shirt with three-quarter length sleeves, a pleated front skirt tucked neatly at the sides of the waist, and a ruffled hip piece shaped like a large bustle. Examination of the sculpture and painting of the region suggests that the costume was designed solely for use on the stage and has no apparent origins in the court costumes of previous epochs of Kerala history.

It is possible that the conventional costumes of Kūṭiyāṭṭam have been adapted and modified by actors of more recent forms of dance drama in Kerala, such as the Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam and the Kathakali. The costumes of the more recent forms have been exaggerated to cause spectacular and startling effects. By comparing the costumes of the same character type in the different forms of dance drama in Kerala we get a good idea of the changes and tendencies that have taken place in the styles and colors of conventional theater dress in one region of India.

Other theater forms in which conventional costumes are worn according to the sex, rank, and station in life of the characters are Yakshagāna<sup>47</sup> and Kuchipudi; these, too, can serve as a source of inspiration. Maya Rao's students in New Delhi continually experiment with dress adapted from traditional forms of theater for their dances based on Sanskrit plays.

The only problem with this approach, as far as I can see, is that it says to the spectators, "this is a Sanskrit play produced in X or Y theatrical style." Thus it argues against presenting Sanskrit theater

as though it were a unique visual experience, which is what it must have been in ancient times.

The second costuming tendency is found among traditional theater forms such as Bhavāi, Tamāshā, and Jātra. Actors wear the contemporary dress of their region with the addition of a few symbolic items, such as hats or shawls. In these forms, the spectators must imagine that the characters are from different historical periods, even though they are dressed in contemporary garb. If a director chooses to set a Sanskrit play in a particular region of India and clothe the actors in the contemporary dress of that region the visual overtone takes an entirely different direction and will obviously affect the perception of the spectators.

Appa Rao suggests yet another alternative in his interpretation of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. He reproduces fragments of sculpture and paintings of the historical dress worn at the time when the major plays were written. Arriving at this solution independently, Raghavan has used this approach in costuming characters in his productions in Madras. Raghavan pays careful attention to historical details of dress adapted mostly from the sculptural figures depicting scenes from the life of Buddha on the magnificent gateways to the great Stupa at Sāñchī, in central India.

Bharata's third division of decoration is makeup (*aṅgarācanā*). He requests the actors to apply color to their faces and bodies according to the character's region of the country, caste, age, and the occasion for his presence on the stage. From the specifications given, it is not clear whether Bharata meant that actors should wear makeup as stylized as that found in Kathakali<sup>48</sup> or the simple makeup used in theater form like Bhavāi.

Bharata's fourth division is "creatures" (*sañjīva*). We are not certain what he meant by the word. Perhaps he means to refer to the behavior of the actors who impersonate animals, birds, and supernatural beings. Or perhaps he refers to the manipulation of "effigies," like those found in Aṅkīyā Nāṭ.

### *Sentiments and Emotions*

Of the four component parts of ancient Indian acting, *sāttvikabhīnaya* is the most confusing and least understood. In his introduction to the *Abhinayadarpaṇam*, Ghosh implies that Nandikeśvara meant *sāttvika* to refer to the balanced combination of appropriate, well-executed conventions rendered in an artful manner by



the actors. He points out that while *āṅgika abhinaya* (which is regarded as a synonym of *sāttvika* by some scholars) "is mostly on external things [for example, physical movement and gestures], and represents ideas conveyed by words, and intellectual changes in man, the *sāttvikābhinaya* is a thing expressing the psyche [of the character]." <sup>49</sup>

In other words, the term means "something invisible."<sup>50</sup> Ghosh also says that *sāttvikābhinaya* "has every chance of degenerating into the *āṅgika abhinaya* when the *nāṭa* [actor] lacks the genius as well as proper training in his art."<sup>51</sup> Perhaps the Western equivalent of Ghosh's definition is "spontaneous" in contrast to the "mechanical" process by which the actor achieves his goal.

Rangacharya, who also admits difficulty in defining the term, interprets it to mean an "expression in a graceful or charming manner of the various *bhāvas* i.e., feelings [of a character]."<sup>52</sup> Based on the contents of chapter 24 in which Bharata discusses *sāttvika*, Rangacharya assumes that the term refers to the proper and improper acts and behavior, speech, and dress of men and women, whether high, middle, or low, in plays dealing principally with themes of love. In other words, Rangacharya believes that Bharata was establishing a code of propriety which emphasized decorous behavior.

Yet another interpretation of *sāttvika* is proposed by Kale who believes that Bharata is being redundant in chapter 22 unless he meant that there were two different schools of acting which prevailed in ancient times. Kale postulates his theory on evidence found in chapter 6 in which Bharata describes a technique of acting that is theatrical and pictorial, one which relies on stylized movements and symbolic gestures to convey moods and emotions. He believes that Bharata refers to an alternative method of acting in chapter 22. "The communication process described here is psychological. The basic approach seems to be empathic. It is a composite form. It blends together the various communicating devices, treated separately in the treatise to formulate a naturalistic acting style. It is possible that Sanskrit drama was enacted in this composite manner during some period of its history."<sup>53</sup> Resolution of the conflicting views presented above is not particularly crucial for contemporary directors, and therefore need not concern us here. For one thing, we are in no position to determine what ancient Indians took as the signs of "spontaneity," "grace," "charm,"

or even what they understood to be "naturalistic acting." In Western theater circles today these terms are often imprecisely used and provide little common basis for agreement among critics as a standard by which an actor's performance may be evaluated.

In reviewing the material concerning the art of acting discussed in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, practiced in the Kūṭiyāṭṭam and other forms of traditional and modern Indian theater, several avenues of approach seem feasible for contemporary directors. The first and simplest extreme is to use the reservoir of Western theater techniques as a basis for a production, appropriating pantomimic movements to define place, allowing the actors to work for a graceful but realistic style of acting throughout. In this style of production, pure dance or dance incorporating symbolic gestures would have no place. The actors should speak rather than sing the verses and make no attempt to recite them as though they were written as poetry, unless a translation is chosen in which they are rendered in rhymed couplets. Costumes could be adapted from any historic period or region of India, provided they suggest characters of the correct religious and occupational community. Makeup could be standard stage makeup, currently used in the West, appropriate for either proscenium or arena staging. Properties and furniture should be few and restricted to only the barest essentials. The acting style could be interpreted as realistic with attempts to add stylized movement at times for variety and emphasis. This approach would be entirely appropriate for the proscenium arch stage in which an attempt is made to define an acting area with entrances up left and up right or an arena or three-quarter round stage in which the acting area is left open and unencumbered by scenery. In summary, this approach is a free, improvised, and creative endeavor, stylized within the limits of Western theatrical convention.

The opposite extreme might be to base a production on one of the several different styles of village theater, preferably one in which information is readily available. Both Balwant Gargi in his 1966 production of *The Little Clay Cart* and Habib Tanvir in his 1954 production of the same play used as the source of their inspiration, Nautanki, a North Indian village theater form to which both directors had easy access. Employing this approach, a director would most probably be obliged to use a system of symbolic

gesture language to communicate some or all of the meaning. Although it is not correct to do so, the sign language of the deaf in this country might be a good starting point for such an attempt rather than the less accessible vocabulary of Indian gesture-language systems. Dances might also be incorporated for the entrance of major characters. Special patterns of movement might be developed to identify each character from all the others and to bring a unity of physical movement to the production. Curtains over the stage doors and those held by stage attendants could be used for entrances and exits and to create special effects.

The vocal patterns that are employed by the characters should be highly stylized to delineate the social rank and temperament of characters. It would seem more in keeping with traditional practices for the actors to listen to and emulate the vocal patterns used in *Kūṭiyāṭṭam*, although popular practices in modern Indian theater give credence to more realistic delivery of dialogue and singing of verses as well.

If the director opts for using a combination of conventional physical and vocal techniques drawn from a wide variety of theater forms, then it may be appropriate to choose costumes, ornaments, and makeup from these different styles of theater. If he selects only one style as a source of inspiration, say *Kūṭiyāṭṭam*, then it may also be best to choose conventional costumes and ornaments of that style alone.

There are obviously more major difficulties in executing the latter conventionalized approach than in the former, relatively realistic, approach. First, the director may need to acquaint himself with the special conventions of the form(s) in order to train his actors, learning to execute their unusual patterns of movement and speech or finding competent assistants with the practical experience that is required. Second, the tasks of the actors and designers are far more complicated. Third, the spectators may need special lectures, training, or demonstration performances prior to the production in order to derive maximum meaning and appreciation from the event. And finally, the cost in labor, money, time, and equipment is likely to put a strain on existing production facilities geared to suit the demands of producing Western plays.

Undoubtedly, the greatest reward of embarking on such a venture, especially within the confines of a college or university theater organization, is educational. All of the members of the pro-

duction unit are bound to learn something new in the process. The director has the challenge of motivating and sustaining interest in the play and the culture from which it springs, as well as making sure that the outcome of the effort is a unified whole. From past experiences I have learned that those who are likely to derive the greatest benefit are the actors who have close daily contact with a cultural and artistic form of expression totally different from their own, and who put in countless hours mastering techniques of movement and gesture that are totally foreign to them. The costume and makeup designers are bound to find the tasks stimulating since they share a major responsibility for the success or failure of the spectacular elements of the venture. The costumers who work with shapes, patterns, and methods of tying and wearing clothing which comes from or approximates that worn by actors in a conventional form of Indian theater, and the makeup artists who experiment with paint that is ground from natural substances and applied on the face in stylized patterns are likely to discover information which may prove useful in other non-Indian projects. Musicians untrained in playing Indian musical instruments and coordinating their work with dancers are likely to derive a new awareness of the potentials of non-Western patterns of rhythm and melody in the creation of dance sequences and the development of dramatic mood and atmosphere.

Obviously, there are different shades of gray between the two extreme approaches articulated above. But before embarking on either course the director must first determine that the experience is worth the effort.

## Notes

1. *Nāṭyaśāstra*, ascribed to Bharatamuni, trans. and ed. Manmohan Ghosh, 2nd rev. ed., vol. 1 (Calcutta: Manisha Granthalaya, 1967); and, vol. 2 (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1961). More recently, G. K. Bhat has translated portions of the text and commented on it in his *Bharata-Natya-Manjari* (Poona, 1975).
2. *Abhinayadarpaṇam*, trans. and ed. Manmohan Ghosh, 2nd rev. ed. (Calcutta: K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1957); it was also published as *The Mirror of Gestures*, trans. Ananda Coomaraswamy and Gopala Krishtnaya Duggirala (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1917).
3. Trans. George C. O. Hass (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1962).

4. For details, consult Adya Rangacharya, *The Indian Theatre* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1971); Balwant Gargi, *Folk Theater of India* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966); and J. C. Mathur, *Drama in Rural India* (New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1964).
5. Farley Richmond, "Sanskrit Plays Abroad," *The Times of India Annual* (1971), pp. 39-48.
6. It has been argued that the Sitabengara Cave at Rāmgarh was constructed for performances and that it is the only piece of theater architecture which survives from classical times. However, the evidence is so flimsy and the structure so crude that I am inclined to doubt that it was ever used for theatrical performances. For details, consult Amulya Charan Vidyabhusan, "The Dance Theatre at Rāmgarh," in *The Theatre of the Hindus* (Calcutta: Susil Gupta, 1955), pp. 217-224.
7. The following scholars agree with this contention: V. Raghavan, "Hindu Theatre," *Indian Historical Quarterly* 9 (1933); D. R. Mankad, "Hindu Theatre," *Indian Historical Quarterly* 8 (September 1932):480-499; Pramod K. Kale, "The *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata. A Selective Critical Exposition for the Western Theatre Scholar," (diss., Wisconsin, 1967); Adya Rangacharya, *Introduction to Bharata's Nāṭyaśāstra* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1966); D. Subba Rao, "A Critical Survey of the Ancient Indian Theatre in Accordance with the Second Chapter of the Bharata *Nāṭyaśāstra*," *Nāṭyaśāstra*, 2nd rev. ed., vol. 1 (Baroda: Caekwad Oriental Series No. 36, 1956); P. S. R. Appa Rao, *Bharata's Naatyasastra*, trans. P. S. R. Appa Rao and P. Sri Rama Sastry (Hyderabad: Naatyasastra Maalaa, 1967). However, Manmohan Ghosh in his "The Hindu Theatre," *Indian Historical Quarterly* 9 (June 1933):591-594, argues that the proportions of the divided space were 72' x 48' and 24' x 48'. The reason for Ghosh's belief have all but been buried by a consensus of contemporary opinion.
8. Ghosh, "The Hindu Theatre," p. 592.
9. "Theatre Architecture in Ancient India," in *The Theatre of the Hindus*, p. 158.
10. Goverdhan Panchai, "The Curtain in Classical Sanskrit Drama," *Sangeet Natak* 25 (July-September 1972):23-38.
11. One such attempt is Shanta Gandhi's model and drawings for a "theatre in a princely court" preserved at the Brander Matthews Dramatic Museum, Columbia University, New York. Unfortunately, the illustrations have not been discussed or interpreted in detail in H. W. Wells, *Six Sanskrit Plays* (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1964).
12. Ghosh and Bhat translate the term as "zone"; Kale prefers "symbolic locale"; and Raghavan and Rangacharya simply speak of "locale."
13. *Śākuntala, or the Recovered Ring*, trans. A. Hjalmar Edgren, in Wells, *Six Sanskrit Plays*.
14. Kale, "The *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata," p. 172.
15. Bhat, *Bharata-Naty-Manjari*, p. 223.
16. Ghosh, *Nāṭyaśāstra*, vol. 1, p. 249.
17. K. Kunjunni Raja, *Kūṭiyāṭṭam* (New Delhi: Sangeet Natak Akademi, 1964), p. 2. For further details concerning the staging of Sanskrit plays in Kūṭiyāṭṭam style, see his "Sanskrit Drama on the Stage," *Journal of the Madras University* 47, no. 2 (July 1975); and chap. 6 of G. H. Tarlekar's *Studies in the Nāṭyaśāstra* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975).
18. C. R. Jones, "The Temple Theatre of Kerala: Its History and Description," (diss., Pennsylvania, 1967); "Source Materials for the Construction of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*," in Wells, *Six Sanskrit Plays*.

- yamaṇḍapa* in the *Śilparatna* and the *Tantrasamuchchaya Śilpabhāgam*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (July–September 1973):286–296; and, "Temple Theatres and the Sanskrit Tradition," *Sanskrita Ranga Annual* 6 (1972):101–112.
19. Goverdhan Panchal, "Kootampalam: Sanskrit Stage of Kerala," *Sangeet Natak* 8 (April–June 1968): 17–30.
  20. Aside from those mentioned in the text, I have seen the standing structures at Tiruvegapuram, Kottapadi, Kottayam, Arppukara, Kitangur, and Haripad. I have also seen the foundation of what may once have been an oval kōṭambalam at Chengannur and the so-called "variant structures" at Ettumannur and Trippunittura which Jones cites. Owing to the unusual nature of the last three structures mentioned, I have not included them in the discussion.
  21. Jones, "The Temple Theatre of Kerala," pl. 19.
  22. P. C. Krishnan Nambudiripad, in "Kūṭiyāṭṭam" (M. Litt. thesis, Madras University, 1962), p. 70, mentions this convention but neglects to say which door is used for which purpose. However, I have it on good authority from L. S. Rajagopalan, a frequent observer of Kūṭiyāṭṭam performances at Trichur, that the upstage left door is used for entrances and the upstage right door is used for exits.
  23. In a 1971 production of *Village Plays of India* at Michigan State University, we chose a grassy knoll in an open field as the site of our performance of excerpts from Bhavai and Yakshagāna. The staging arrangement described here was about the same. The results are reported in *Sangeet Natak* 32 (April–June 1974).
  27. Shudraka, *The Little Clay Cart*, trans. Arthur W. Ryder and adapt. Agnes Morgan, (New York: Theatre Arts, 1934).
  25. See Richmond, "Sanskrit Plays Abroad."
  26. An hour and a half colored video cassette of the performance was done in a studio and is available for rental or sale by writing Instructional Television Services, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan 48824
  27. *Abhinayadarpaṇam*, p. 81.
  28. G. K. Bhat, "Nāṭya and Nṛtya: An Aspect of Dramatic Representation," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bombay* 39–40 (1964–1965):154.
  29. Kale, "The Nāṭyaśāstra of Bharata," p. 200.
  30. Ibid.
  31. V. Raghavan, "Music in Ancient Indian Drama," *The Journal of the Music Academy* (Madras) 25 (1954):87.
  32. Ghosh, *Nāṭyaśāstra*, vol. 1, pp. 169–170.
  33. For excellent photographic illustrations of how *abhinaya* works in Odissi and Kathak dance, which is not appreciably different from the *abhinaya* in Kuchipudi, directors are encouraged to consult Sunil Kothari's article "Odissi Dance," *Quarterly Journal of the National Center for the Performing Arts* 3, 2 (June 1974):37–49; and Norvin Hein's *The Miracle Plays of Mathura* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), pl. III, A, and B.
  34. Ghosh, *Nāṭyaśāstra*, vol. 1, p. 225.
  35. An excellent example of the pantomimic techniques of the Peking Opera may be seen in the film *A Night at the Peking Opera*, available for rental from Film Images, Inc., 17 W. 60th Street, New York, N. Y. 10023, or from Audio Visual Center, Media Library, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa. Of particular interest is the boatman scene and that of the highwayman at the inn.
  36. Kale, "The Nāṭyaśāstra of Bharata," p. 180.
  37. H. H. Wilson, "The Language of the Hindu Theatre," in *The Theatre of the Hindus*, p. 46.

38. L. S. Rajagopalan, "Music in Kootiyattam," *Sangeet Natak* 10 (October-December 1968):12-25; and Nambudiripad, "Kūṭiyāṭṭam."
39. Fortunately, recordings of the Kūṭiyāṭṭam are now available in the United States and may be heard to great advantage. Several tapes are in my possession which I would be happy to share with any ambitious director interested in pursuing the subject in detail.
40. Kale, "The *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata," p. 190.
41. Ibid, p. 173.
42. Banda Kanakalingashwara Rao, "The Kūchīpūḍī Dance Drama," *Marg* 19 (March 1966):30-36; illus. no. 2.
43. For details, see Maheswar Neog, *Śaṅkaradeva and His Times* (Gauhati: University Press, 1965), pp. 270-271. As far as I am aware, the only published illustrations of the *chō* are to be found in my articles "Selected Crafts of Traditional Indian Theatre," *The Times of India Annual* (1972), pp. 29-36; and "Vaiṣṇava Drama of Assam," *Educational Theatre Journal* 26, no. 2 (May 1974):145-163.
44. C. K. Bhat, *Bhasha Studies* (Kolhapur: Maharashtra Granth Bhandar, 1968), pp. 115-126.
45. Panchal, "The Curtain in Classical Sanskrit Drama."
46. The distinguished critic Ananda Coomaraswamy, in a note published in the *Indian Historical Quarterly* 9 (June 1933):594, pointed out the similarity of the curtained entrances of the Chinese teahouse theaters of his day to those of the ancient Indian theaters. It should be pointed out here that the outdoor theater structure depicted in a Sung Dynasty scroll painting entitled "The City of Cathay," of the thirteenth century, has two doors in the upstage wall which are curtained. The similarities between this illustration, the scanty information we have about the stage and dressing area of the Sanskrit theater, and the pageant wagon stages of medieval England deserves closer investigation.
47. For copious details, see Martha Ashton, "Yakshagana Badagattittu Bayalata: A South Indian Dance Drama," (diss., Michigan State University, 1972).
48. Although marred by inaccurate details, the most copious study of ornaments, costumes, and makeup of Kathakali is "Selected Crafts of Kerala," *Census of India: 1961* 7, Kerala, pt. 7A, pp. 33-74.
49. *Abhinayadarpaṇam*, p. 14.
50. Ghosh, *Nāṭyaśāstra*, vol. 1, p. 442.
51. *Abhinayadarpaṇam*, p. 14. In an unpublished paper entitled "The Technique of *Abhinaya*," Rāma Cākyaṛ, noted actor and teacher of Kūṭiyāṭṭam, has said, "Sattvikam will emerge of its own out of *āṅgikam* [physical movements, particularly of the eyes] done to perfection on the basis of the *śloka* [verse]."
52. Rangacharya, *The Indian Theatre*, p. 36.
53. Kale, "The *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata," p. 196.

# A Sanskrit Play in Performance: *The Vision of Vāsavadattā*

Shanta Gandhi

WE HAVE INHERITED a rich dramatic literature from the ancient Indian theater. Can it offer a rewarding theater experience today as it must have done in the past? Would the distance in time and space that separates us from Bhāsa, Kālidāsa, and others who wrote for that theater, prevent us from enjoying the aesthetic flavor of their work? Is its appeal limited only to India, or can it be universal?

To answer these and other relevant questions, one must see the performance of a Sanskrit play and learn from the audience reaction. Unfortunately, even in India, when on rare occasions these plays are performed, the authenticity of the production style cannot be taken for granted.

It is very much to the point that the International Conference of the Art of Sanskrit Drama in Performance, held at the University of Hawaii, has focused the attention of admirers of Sanskrit plays on the problems of their production. The presentation of *The Vision of Vāsavadattā*, by Bhāsa,<sup>1</sup> at Kennedy Theater in Honolulu, 15-24 March 1974, was an attempt to grapple with the multitude of practical problems which face the theater artist in the task of recreating this form on the living stage for a contemporary audience. I would like to share with you some of the experiences of this production which I directed.

A director's approach to producing a Sanskrit play today, however, cannot be understood except in the context of the conventions of the ancient theatrical tradition to which the play belongs. The



fact is, that tradition—the performance tradition of Sanskrit theater—has not maintained its continuity even in the country of its origin, and hence the problems of reconstruction are very great. The break in this tradition occurred around the eleventh century A.D. I would like to consider the situation before and after this break.

The folk and the sophisticated theater must have coexisted and influenced each other for many centuries before the birth of Christ. By that time, ten major genres (*rūpaka*) and about eighteen minor genres (*uparūpaka*) had evolved, all of them *rasa* oriented. The experience of this development was codified in works on ancient Indian dramaturgy such as the *Nāṭa Sūtra* of Pāṇini, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata, and the commentaries of other ancient writers who followed. This codification must have contributed to the evolution of a common ethos and aesthetic norm among the elite of the entire subcontinent. A touring group of professional performers might take into account local tastes when selecting a play, costumes, expressions, and gesture patterns. They may even have brought in minor variations of the theater conventions to suit local usages without basically changing their production style. The cultural milieu of the time throughout the land, however, encompassed an awareness of the common theater conventions and the ability to judge the relevance of a style for a given type of play. Bhāsa's *Vision of Vāsavadattā*, for instance, would have retained its basic form of production no matter where it was presented on the Indian subcontinent.

After the eleventh century, about the same time that the sophisticated theater seems to have undergone a qualitative change, regional languages began to develop the distinctive characteristics by which we know them today. This development must have had a significant influence on those major genres (*rūpaka*) which relied on the dramatic word as their dominant medium of expression. The minor dramatic forms (*uparūpaka*), with their emphasis on dance and/or music, may not have been affected to the same extent. The *rūpaka* used a well-defined written script, unlike the *uparūpaka*. The *uparūpaka* forms may have been either a part of the folk stream in ancient Indian theater, or at least, very close to it. Some of the regional theater forms that exist in India today may be traced to this period (but that is, to many scholars, still an open question).

It was after the eleventh century A.D., that the emphasis seems to have shifted from a single subcontinental dramatic ethos to a number of regional ones, with the result that each one of them today has its own hand gestures and theater conventions, which may be similar to those mentioned in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, but certainly are not the same. The degree of emphasis on dance and music, as compared to the dramatic dialogue, differs from one regional style to another, but in no surviving traditional form does the dramatic word dominate the style as it must have done in the preeleventh century performances of the sophisticated major plays, of which *The Vision of Vāsavadattā* is an outstanding example.

It is possible that while the performing tradition of the sophisticated theater was lost, the tradition of the minor forms of theater continued uninterrupted, in spite of ups and downs, incorporating and adapting the most popular plays of the sophisticated tradition. A few traditional forms, Kūṭiyāṭṭam in Kerala, Kuchipudi in Andhra Pradesh, and Aṅkīya Nāṭ in Assam, have some Sanskrit plays in their repertoires. But they have moved away from the original sources considerably. In the Kūṭiyāṭṭam repertoire, for example, are some of Bhāsa's plays, including *The Vision of Vāsavadattā*, but now they are rarely performed. Moreover, in Kūṭiyāṭṭam, the jester (*vidūṣaka*) comments on the Sanskrit text in his own regional language and dominates the entire performance. While his references to day-to-day events may bring a play closer to the audience, it does alter the delicate balance of the classics.

However, it must be mentioned here that, although forms like Kūṭiyāṭṭam cannot serve as an exact model for the visualization of an ancient performance of a Sanskrit play, they do give a better idea of ancient theater conventions than performances of these classics sometimes staged in India today in which the Western realistic production style is imposed on them.

Perhaps Kerala at one stage in its history felt, just as we are feeling today, the need to bring the best of the ancient Indian theater to the people of that time. The producers of these plays had to find some way of overcoming the gap that may have existed between them and the sophisticated ancient theater resulting from the break in tradition. Everyone knew of the practice of singing or reciting episodes from the two major epics of India—the *Ramāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*—and relating them to contemporary life through relevant comments. This may have provided an easily adaptable model for the Kūṭiyāṭṭam players in medieval times.

Today, if we wish to bring alive a Sanskrit play on the stage, we are faced with a similar problem. Modern audiences in India are not aware of ancient theater conventions, nor do they necessarily share all the values they project. Yet modern Indian theater, for the sake of its own future growth, will have to strike roots deep into its past. It should be able to present the ancient plays in an idiom that the modern audience can appreciate. This must be done without distorting the basic ethos of the ancient Indian play. This can either be done, I believe, in one of two ways: we may adapt an existing, specific style or technique (such as *Kūṭiyāṭṭam*), or we may evolve or create a new idiom that we feel is appropriate to the circumstance.

In either case we shall have to begin by trying to understand what the ancient Indian theater was like in actual practice. (The modern Indian theater has yet to forge its links with the past; what the European Renaissance did for Greek theater has yet to be done for Indian theater.) Others have already described many of its elements; my purpose is to show the practical consequences of this knowledge. We must begin at the beginning.

The ancient Indian theater developed the *rasa* theory of aesthetics. Sanskrit plays are *rasa* oriented; they are intended to elicit *rasa*, a joyful consciousness (*ānandamayī cetanā*) that a spectator experiences when all his conflicts are resolved and he feels in harmony with himself and with nature. This type of aesthetic pleasure is the result of the negation of a desire through its fulfillment, a concept based on the ancient Indian world view which sees man as a part of nature, rather than man versus nature. This philosophy encourages consensus and synthesis rather than confrontation and conflict.

*Rasa* theory, having first evolved in relation to the ancient Indian theater, was later applied to all the arts. The dramatic structure of a Sanskrit play is molded by this theory. The play begins with an event that disturbs the emotional equilibrium of the hero and arouses his desire. His efforts towards the fulfillment of this desire motivate the dramatic action (*kārya*). During this process he has to face and overcome obstacles (*vighna*) to achieve his desired objective. Since a Sanskrit play is expected to evoke *rasa*, the play cannot end with an unresolved conflict. A Sanskrit play may concern itself with the entire range of human emotions but the optimism of its underlying philosophy does not allow pathos to domi-

nate its total impact. Consequently, there is not much room for "tragedy" in this form of theater.

In social terms, this theater offered a model of socially desirable behavior. Although dramatic forms such as farces and comedies (*prahasana*) did project current controversies, ancient Indian theater was not a theater of debate. A Sanskrit drama presents what *should be* rather than what *is*. With inherent faith in the future of man, it tries to explore the inner realities. The playwright imbues his hero (*dhīra nāyaka*)<sup>2</sup> with sufficiently strong moral calibre which will enable him to overcome all the dramatic obstacles. Instead of exploiting obstacles in order to build up dramatic tension that leads to an intense conflict, the play provides periodic, small-scale solutions, relieving tension at every stage. The playwright organizes his dramatic material in a manner which resolves the conflict.

The three main aspects of the plot (*vastu* or *itivr̥tta*) are: the state of dramatic action (*kāryāvasthā*), the nature of the subject matter (*arthaprakṛti*), and junctures or links (*sandhi*). Each of them develops through five phases. This gradual unfolding of the plot, further assisted by the sixty-four sublinks (*sandhyāṅga*), ensures a smooth curve of emotional tension. The division of a play into acts and the five linking devices (*arthopakṣepaka*),<sup>3</sup> as well as the use of dramatic devices like *patākāsthānaka*, is also determined by the supreme objective of the Sanskrit play—the integration of human experience through the evocation of *rasa*.

In sum, Sanskrit drama is different in fundamental ways from conflict-oriented Western drama and also from that segment of world drama current today which is imbued with pessimism. So the question arises, how would a contemporary audience conditioned almost entirely to such plays respond to a Sanskrit play?

Today we live in an atmosphere of rapid change, growing conflicts, and intense fragmentation of the human experience. Yet there is a small but growing number of people all over the world who feel the need for a cultural experience that will reassert faith in the ability of man and help him rediscover the positive aspects of life. The philosophy of the ancient Indian *rasa*-oriented plays could provide an opportunity not only to cultivate the best in us as human beings, but also to enable us to sustain and nourish a positive world view. A collection of some five hundred manuscripts of ancient Indian Sanskrit plays exists for us to explore. At least thirty

to forty of them are rich enough in philosophy and form to have a universal appeal. They can transcend the barriers of language and culture and enrich the world's cultural heritage. Producing these plays in order to discover their relevance to our times would also help us to develop new theatrical forms through which we can express the experiences of today in a manner that has a deep emotional base rather than superficial gimmickry.

The ancient Indian theater provides a deep insight into the development of an integrated theater as a composite art which uses words, dance, and music. There are many theater workers who are searching in this direction; the exploration of ancient Indian theater would not only facilitate but enhance their efforts in creating a relevant, integrated theater form.

Any serious attempt at rediscovering a relevant style for producing the Indian classics must take the following factors into consideration:

1. Absence of a surviving playhouse: Unlike the Greek theater, no ancient Indian playhouse has survived. It is doubtful whether the playhouses described by the *Nāṭyaśāstra* existed even in the eleventh century A.D., when Abhinavagupta wrote his commentary on the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. He does not seem to be personally acquainted with them. Theater arcades (*natyamaṇḍapa*) attached to some temples, especially the *kūṭambalam* in Kerala, may be of help in reconstructing the architectural resources available to the performers in ancient Indian theater—especially if they are studied in relation to the ground plans of the three types of playhouses described in the second chapter of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

These three types are: asymmetrical (*vikṛṣṭa*), in which the acting area was rectangular; square (*caturaśra*), with square acting area; and triangular (*tryaśra*), with a triangular acting area. Perhaps they were used for performing different types of plays. For example, the dramatic structure of surviving heroic plays in one act (*vyāyoga*, one of the ten types of *rūpaka*) suggests that the square stage is more suitable for their performance than a rectangular one. Perhaps the rectangular acting area was preferred for the presentation of the most complex and sophisticated types of major plays known as *prakaraṇa* and *nāṭaka*, of which *The Vision of Vāsavadattā* is an example.

Besides the shape of the acting areas, the juxtapositioning of the

actor in relation to the spectators may have contributed towards the emergence of these three types of playhouses. In the asymmetrical (*vikṛṣṭa*) it was frontal as it is in a modern proscenium theater. From this point of view, the Kennedy Theater, where *The Vision of Vasavadattā* was presented, fulfilled the requirements of the ancient Indian theater convention without posing any basic problems.

2. Absence of trained troupes: The ancient Indian theater was a total theater, integrating the dramatic word with dance, music, and all kinds of other arts and crafts. The performers underwent long, intensive, and comprehensive training in speech, acting, music and dance, mime and movement before they could appear on stage. A sustained effort and dedication of this kind can only be expected from professional artists. Such professional artists are not available today, even in India. It is extremely difficult, if not almost impossible, to find a performer who can speak Sanskrit, act, sing, and dance. There is no ready-made professional troupe to whom the task of producing a Sanskrit play in the ancient style can be entrusted. It goes without saying that such a trained group did not exist for the production in Hawaii.

3. Difficulties in designing the production: The ancient Indian theater was an actor's theater. It did not use a front curtain, elaborate painted scenery, or a complicated lighting system. The actor, through the four dimensions of acting (*abhinaya*), projected the meaning and the mood of the play.

The term *abhinaya* means that which carries the meaning of the play to the spectator. It implies not merely "acting" as we understand it today, but also the external assistance that an actor might get for establishing his character from costumes, makeup, and stage properties. Thus when we use the English term "acting" for "*abhinaya*" in this discussion, we should understand this broader meaning. The four dimensions of "acting" (*abhinaya*) are movement and gesture (*āṅgika*), speech, sound, and music (*vācika*), use of accessories (*dhārya*), and emotional expression (*sāttvika*).

a. Movement (*āṅgika abhinaya*): This dimension of acting includes facial expression, hand gestures, and the entire movement pattern of the body, which was stylized. Indian theater tradition developed a gesture language which assisted the actor in highlighting the nuances of his speech. He could use hand gestures (*mudra*)

as one uses the alphabet to make visual sentences that would interpret a given verse, evoke images and associations, and give deeper dimensions to significant passages. He could freeze into different poses (*karāṇa*) to create relevant visual pictures or use different ways of walking (*gati* and *cārt*) to establish his character and to bring out his mental as well as physical state in a given situation.

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* explores the expressive potentialities of different limbs of the human body in great detail. Although the high degree of stylization described in it implies training in dance, it does not necessarily indicate dance itself. A Sanskrit play was not a ballet. Today, it is difficult to choose the appropriate degree of stylization for a given play in the absence of a living model.

b. Sound (*vācika abhinaya*): This dimension covers not only speech but the entire sound pattern of the production, including music. A Sanskrit play uses prose as well as verse. Meters<sup>8</sup> are carefully chosen to suit the mood of the moment. Some of these meters can be set to music. Those which cannot be sung are suitable for chanting or reciting. The use of several dialects (Prakrits) in the play also adds to the variety of the sound pattern as a whole. Prose sections, which have their own rhythm, have to be sensitively blended with the rhythm of the verse. The problems of transition from prose to verse, and vice versa, in relation to the movement pattern require special care in performance.

As far as music is concerned, the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, in chapter 33, describes the orchestra as consisting of nine to eleven instruments plus one male and one female singer. This number could be increased if necessary. The orchestra (*kutapa*) had stringed instruments (*tata*) such as different kinds of lutes (*vīṇā*), covered instruments (*avanaddha*) which were different kinds of drums, solid instruments (*ghana*) such as cymbals, and hollow instruments (*suśira*), or flutes.

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* also mentions *dhruvā*, which were either songs or rhythmic musical patterns with or without words. They were used for specific purposes like the entry and exit of a character, relieving the tension of a situation, and covering up a fault during a performance. They did not necessarily form a part of the written text. Probably each troupe had its own stock of *dhruvā* out of which they chose an appropriate one for a given situation in any play.

Although the *Nāṭyaśāstra* does describe in some detail the musi-

cal tradition of the times, it is difficult to reconstruct a musical score with any degree of certainty as to its authenticity. There is a need for much more production-based research for this purpose. In the absence of such research, one can only try to arrive at a musical form that is dramatically valid, even though it may not be the same as that suggested in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, by utilizing the earliest known forms.

c. Accessories (*āhārya abhinaya*): While the actor had to rely mainly on his own body to project the meaning of the play and evoke *rasa* in the audience, he could also utilize external objects—costumes, makeup, and stage properties—to establish his character.

One can, no doubt, get valuable hints from surviving traditional theater forms in designing the production of a Sanskrit play. The difficulty arises from the fact that there is considerable variety as far as costumes, makeup, and stage properties are concerned. Though other sources of reference, such as ancient paintings and sculpture, can help provide models for designing costumes and stage properties, the subtleties of stylization in makeup and color scheme still remain elusive. Moreover, the aesthetic susceptibilities of modern audiences may come into conflict with the demands of historical authenticity, and in turn endanger the basic intentions of the ancient Indian playwright. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* to some extent can help in determining whether one has made an appropriate choice.

For example, in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, certain colors are associated with different *rasa*. This color association is important for the design of costumes as well as the makeup of different characters—which may include the painting of their bodies. One has to use one's own discretion in following this convention because the names of different colors and associations have changed in the course of time. Take, for example, the color called *śyāma* which is associated with the *rasa* of love. Today we do not know exactly what color *śyāma* refers to. Reference to the traditional theater forms does not help us in clarifying this issue. In South Indian forms like Kūṭiyāṭṭam and Kathakali, pale green is used by noble lovers. On the other hand, similar characters in Rās Līlā in North India use pale blue. Literary works describe *śyāma* as the luminous color of a rain-bearing cloud or the deep purple of the *jaman* fruit.

Lighting, when required, was provided by oil lamps and



torches. This explains why the long, narrow rectangular acting area was preferred for presenting the complex dramatic forms in which more characters are present on the stage at the same time. In one of the existing folk dramas of western India called Bhavāi, the actor uses small torches to highlight his expression at dramatic moments. Use of similar devices in ancient India cannot be ruled out. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* does not discuss lighting in great detail, perhaps because in those days the performances had to be given at anytime, to suit the convenience of the chief patron who commissioned the performance. Daylight performances may have been popular.

As regards stage scenery, it must be remembered that unlike modern plays, a Sanskrit drama did not require the construction of separate sets, even for multiscene plays. All plays were performed either within the permanent framework of a theater suitable for a given type of play, or in a temporary structure approximating the essential features of the permanent theaters. The presence of at least twelve pillars for supporting the roof over the stage must have inspired the evolution of theater conventions like the zonal divisions (*kakṣyāvibhāga*) which facilitate the uninterrupted continuity of dramatic action; in spite of the fact that in a Sanskrit play a locale may change within the same act.

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* discusses hand as well as stage properties in great detail, but there is nothing to suggest that cutouts or solid scene props were used to create the illusion of reality as was done in nineteenth-century Western theater. Unfortunately, today, under the influence of the modern commercial theater, realistic scenery is frequently used in presenting a Sanskrit play. If the passages of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* referring to scenery are read in the context of the text of the surviving ancient plays, and also in the context of other theater conventions like zonal divisions and the four dimensions of acting, it seems more likely that only symbolic props were used when absolutely necessary.

d. Emotional expression (*sāttvika abhinaya*): This dimension of acting refers to expression of the emotional state of the character and is directly related to the process of evoking *rasa*. The three dimensions of acting described earlier are motivated and governed by it. At its climax it is physically expressed through tears, trembling, or other visible demonstrations of emotion. This type of acting depends on the actor's understanding of the play, the depth of

his perception, and sensitive awareness, if not experience, of the emotional complexities inherent in human life.

A modern actor may not be in total agreement with the basic philosophy of an ancient play and may find it difficult to identify himself with the character he is playing. He should be assured that modern spectators also share this difficulty. In order to fulfill his responsibility of interpreting the ancient character to his audience, *he* must first learn to appreciate the ethos of the society in which the character lived.

The organic relationship between acting and the text is much closer in a *rasa*-oriented play than in a modern play. In order to appreciate the importance of this fact, it is necessary to understand the process of evoking *rasa*.

All human beings, irrespective of time and space, are capable of feeling certain basic emotions. These basic emotions or urges, which are of a permanent nature, are called permanent emotions (*sthāyibhāva*). The *Nāṭyaśāstra* recognizes only eight of them. They are the human capacities to love (*rati*), to feel enthusiastic about meeting a challenge (*utsāha*), to feel a sense of wonder (*vismaya*), to be able to laugh (*hāsa*), to feel disgust (*bibhatsā*), anger (*krodha*), sorrow (*śoka*), and fear (*bhaya*). To this list of basic emotions later dramaturgists have added equanimity (*śamatā*), affection (*mamata*), devotion (*bhagavadrati*), and others.

Some of these urges are pleasant in themselves while others can be very painful. Luckily, they lie dormant until they are aroused by a suitable stimulus. In real life most events are capable of arousing them indiscriminately, leading to chaotic and painful experiences. A *rasa*-oriented play, on the other hand, carefully predetermines which of these basic emotions are to be aroused, when they are to be aroused, and how they are to be aroused. In order to ensure the evocation of joyful consciousness (*rasa*) in the audience, it takes into account the fact that each of these basic emotions is capable of being transformed into its respective *rasa* when it is universalized (*sādhārāṇīkaraṇa*). In this process, a dormant basic emotion of a hero is brought to the conscious level in an encounter with a suitable stimulus (*vibhāva*). That dimension of the stimulus which is the basic cause of arousing the permanent emotion is called *ālambanavibhāva*. In a love story the heroine would be the causative stimulus, because it is only after meeting her that the

hero begins to feel conscious of his erotic emotion which until then had been dormant. In the early part of a drama, these stirrings are very feeble. Their intensity is weakened by the counteraction of other basic emotions which are aroused simultaneously and may have a negative effect on the erotic emotion. The process of bringing a dormant emotion to a conscious level is similar to what takes place when one plucks a single string of an instrument to get a certain note but inevitably gets an accompanying wave of resonance.

A favorable atmosphere is required to strengthen and stabilize this tentative initial conscious stirring of an emotion; it pushes the unhelpful and irrelevant basic emotions back into their dormant states. Springtime, a joyful garden, moonlight, are obviously more congenial to passionate love than a cremation ground full of dead bodies. As the heroine is the cause of the erotic emotion in the hero, the garden and the moonlight are the stabilizing factors of this emotion. These stabilizing factors are called the further stimuli (*uddīpanaviśhāva*).

The audience should be able to identify with the experience of the hero throughout the play. It is through the medium of the hero that the audience can experience *rasa*. Therefore, in the context of the evocation of *rasa* the hero is considered to be the main support or the refuge of the *rasa* (*āśraya*).<sup>6</sup>

The playwright provides a suitable situation which the actors can and must take advantage of. The total impact of their acting in this context is known as *anubhāva*. During the course of dramatic action, the characters go through various transitory emotions known as *samcāribhāva*. There are thirty-three of them, and it is important that the actor be able to identify and portray these transitory emotions. The analysis of the character in terms of the transitory emotions, in the context of the sublinks (*sandhyāṅga*) of the play, helps the actor to determine how he should act at a given moment.

A play may evoke several *rasa* but only one of them is permitted to become dominant (*pradhāna rasa*). The playwright sees to it that other *rasa* are subordinated to it. These subordinate *rasa*, known as *gauṇa rasa*, support and strengthen the dominant *rasa*. All the characters in a *rasa*-oriented play are the causative factors of a dominant *rasa* or of some subordinate *rasa*. This has a practical significance for the actor: it helps him to find the key to the character he is to play.

Within the *rasa* structure of a particular play, each character plays a predetermined role which must eventually enhance the evocation of the dominant *rasa*. Though a degree of structuring is present in any play, a *rasa*-oriented play differs from a conflict-oriented play insofar as it is built upon a basic and firm structure of a dominant *rasa* supported by various subordinate *rasa*. The very choice of these subordinate *rasa* is determined by the need to evoke the dominant *rasa*, and the characters who evoke the subordinate *rasa* are juxtaposed in a manner that will enhance the evocation of the dominant *rasa*. This kind of structuring helps an actor to know his place in relation to the main character and all the other characters. His awareness in turn strengthens his ability to remain within his own character throughout the play. This explains why the minor roles in *The Vision of Vāsavadattā* at Hawaii came through "surprisingly strong," as noted in a local newspaper review.

During the course of the play, even painful emotions are sublimated and transformed into joyful consciousness with the flavor of their respective *rasa* through the process of universalization (*sādhārāṇīkaraṇa*). An artist can create a beautiful picture out of disgusting raw material like a rotting body dumped on a garbage heap. A modern director must understand the implications of this fact.

The text of the play indicates the degree and the type of stylization suitable for its acting and dramatic production. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* describes two basic theatrical styles (*dharmīn*), four basic theatrical tendencies (*vṛtti*), and four kinds of regional usages (*pravṛtti*) which influence the entire production. The theatrical styles indicate the degree of stylization, the dramatic tendencies, and the type of stylization that a given production should have. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* also mentions certain general categories such as the delicate and vigorous styles. None of these styles of acting and production are "naturalistic" or "realistic" in the sense understood in modern theater, although all styles have some reference to reality. They differ from each other in the degree and type of abstraction.

The two types of dramatic styles are realistic (*lokadharmin*) and conventional (*nāṭyadharmin*). The latter is more abstract than the former. The folk theater may have been almost exclusively realistic. In the sophisticated theater, with its insistence on refinement,

the conventionalized became predominant. That does not mean that realism was totally absent from the refined genres. While the plays of Kālidāsa and Bhāsa were on the whole conventional, some scenes from their plays could be performed in the more realistic style.

The four theatrical tendencies are called *kaiśikī*, *ārabhaṭī*, *bhārātī* and *sātvatī*. The *kaiśikī* is suitable for expressing delicate emotions, especially in the lyrical plays (with love as the dominant *rasa*) where there are a large number of women characters. It encourages tender emotions expressed through graceful dancelike movement patterns and music. *Ārabhaṭī*, on the other hand, is suitable for spectacular plays evoking vigorous emotions like heroism, anger, and so on. In such plays women play a very insignificant role, if any, and the hero exhibits excessive self-confidence bordering on arrogance (*dhīrodātta*). *Bhārātī* implies overwhelming emphasis on the spoken word and is suitable for plays where the author relies mainly on his literary skill for sharing his experience with the audience. Its appeal may be more intellectual than emotional. Implications of *sātvatī* are not clear. Perhaps it was related to psychological plays where the expression of emotions was of vital importance.

These basic tendencies could be further interpreted according to four main kinds of regional usages (*pravṛtti*). The same character may use a different gesture pattern, wear a different costume and makeup according to different regional tastes, and yet evoke the same *rasa*. A modern director who can understand and appreciate this aspect of the ancient production style will find it easier to resolve many practical problems that crop up from time to time in presenting a play to an audience with a different cultural background. One main objective in *rasa*-oriented plays is to evoke *rasa*. Anything that stands in the way must be removed. Even if a historically authentic costume, makeup, a gesture, or a posture distracts the attention of the audience from the essence of the play, it must be discarded in favor of that which is more acceptable to the audience. The *rasa*-oriented play demands a gradual cultivation of taste in the audience. One cannot achieve *rasa* through shocking the audience into acceptance.

There is very little work done so far, even by scholars, on theatrical styles, tendencies, and regional usage as a whole. As this aspect of performance has a very important practical implication,

theater workers interested in producing Sanskrit plays must give their serious attention to the study of this problem.

In modern times, there is a language barrier which needs to be overcome in the production of a Sanskrit play. Medieval India tried to solve this problem by letting a character like a jester (*vidūṣaka*) repeat in the vernacular, and comment on, the Sanskrit dialogue of other characters. This was the continuation of a tradition followed by the Sanskrit writers themselves. Perhaps, even in ancient India, a common man did not speak or fully understand Sanskrit. This may be the reason why all the women characters, as well as the characters belonging to the lower social strata, spoke Prakrit, the language of the common man. Later traditional forms like *Kūṭiyāṭṭam* have, of course, replaced the Prakrits with their regional languages, but in doing so, the role of the jester has remained and is even enlarged. Inevitably this affects the delicate balance of the original play. If the purpose of presenting an ancient play is to share its original flavor with a modern audience, one should try to avoid the danger of inadvertently adapting a distortion such as this.

We can attack this problem today by presenting ancient plays in translation, and retaining as much of the original flavor as possible. However, adequate translations are not readily available even in modern Indian languages. A translator of the classics must be acquainted with the problems of dramaturgy as well as poetry. In some Indian languages it is possible to use the same meters in which ancient verses were written without distorting the nature of the modern language. In other languages this is not possible. Some translators try to bypass this problem by resorting to free verse or by eliminating verse altogether. Such translations may be valid as far as the appreciation of the literary values of the play is concerned, but they cannot serve the purpose of the production which seeks to recapture the ancient style of performance. For this purpose it is essential to retain the balance between the prose and the verse in the original.

Given these circumstances, what are the sources that can provide reliable suggestions and assistance in our attempt at understanding the production style of the ancient Indian theater?

The dramatic structure, as well as the stage directions given in the play, are the most reliable guides available to a modern direc-

tor who wants to present a Sanskrit classic. True, these directions may not have been written by the playwright himself. They may have been incorporated into the production script by the producers of the play at some later time. What we have inherited may have been one of these production scripts. But they do indicate a continuity in a style of production. This is the nearest one can hope to reach in the search for a lost tradition. To a modern director, the possibility of such interpolations need not present a serious obstacle as it might to a historian of literature.

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* and the works of later dramaturgists can help us in interpreting these stage directions. The surviving traditional Indian theater can also provide a valid source of supplementary assistance, especially where corroboration is required. One can get valuable hints not only from such theater forms in India, but also from the traditional theater of those Asian countries with which ancient India was in contact.

It is a significant coincidence that the uninterrupted tradition of formal classical theater in Japan, China, and Southeast Asia can be traced back to only about the thirteenth century A.D. This is the same period to which the surviving Indian traditional forms are generally traced. Southeast Asia has evolved its own versions of ancient Indian epics—the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*—but not of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. It is known that cultural exchange in that period took place through monks and traders rather than at the state level. This fact may partly explain the unfamiliarity with the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Although Southeast Asians have their own distinctive aesthetic norms, some of their theater conventions are very similar, if not the same, to those described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Some features mentioned in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* have not survived in the existing traditional theater forms in India. To understand them, one has to study the traditional forms of Asia. Drama in Asia has a closer affinity with the *rasa*-oriented ancient Indian theater than with the conflict-based Western theater.

The production of *The Vision of Vāsavadattā* that I directed at the University of Hawaii was part of the general education of students in the drama program. In six months time at the University it was not possible to conduct special research into the ancient Indian style of production, but I was asked to bring to bear such knowledge and experience that I possess in an attempt to evolve a

style of production that would make *The Vision of Vāsavadattā* a meaningful experience for the audience in Hawaii without compromising the basic integrity of its original form and content. The specific aim was to work as much within the intentions of the ancient performance tradition as time and practical circumstances would allow.

In our situation at Hawaii, an international cast of students had to be initiated into the ethos of the play and into a culture with which they were largely unfamiliar. It may be mentioned, that, for such an effort to be successful, we believed, the involvement of the actors alone would not be enough. The entire team of theater workers, including the technicians, needed to share the purpose and objectives of the experiment. The audience would also have to be in a position to appreciate the ethos of the culture from which such a play emerged.

To this end, an all-day Indian festival, or *mela*, was organized at the Honolulu Academy of Arts. The *mela*, along with other activities, was presented in the few weeks preceding the production of the play in an attempt to create a receptive attitude among the playgoers and generate an understanding of the ethos of Sanskrit drama. Guests participated in the various activities which were presented, such as floor decorating, arts and crafts, folk dance, and music. This event provided an opportunity for the community as a whole to be introduced in a more personal way to a culture that may have seemed at first distant and remote.

In recent years, Western scholars have shown increasing interest in the *rasa* theory. It was considered worthwhile to take this opportunity to find out how a modern Western audience would respond to a *rasa*-oriented play. From this point of view, it was essential to select a play which would underline the distinctive features of *rasa*-oriented plays. Some major genres—farces and social comedies, for example—have much in common with conflict-based Western plays. A social play like *The Little Clay Cart* (*Mṛcchakaṭika*), or a farce like *A Saint and a Prostitute* (*Bhagavadajjūktiya*) could, perhaps, be more readily acceptable to a modern audience than a play like *The Vision of Vāsavadattā*. Although practical considerations like the availability of actors and actresses at the University of Hawaii influenced the selection, we deliberately chose to do this relatively difficult play because it is typically Indian in tone, content, story, and emphasis upon *rasa*. Having made



the choice, it was necessary to work through the special demands deriving from the *rasa* structure of this play.

*The Vision of Vāsavadattā* is the second play of a two-play series written by Bhāsa about the legendary Udayana, king of Vatsa in ancient India. The first play, called *The Vow of Yaugandharāyaṇa* (*Pratijñāyaugandharāyaṇa*), is about the prime minister of Vatsa. These plays dramatize the struggle for power between the ancient Indian kingdom of Vatsa and its neighboring rivals. The dominant *rasa* of the two plays taken together is heroic, but that of the second is lyrical. When producing the second of the two plays, one has to take into account the predominance of the heroic *rasa* in spite of its lyrical overtones in *The Vision of Vāsavadattā*. Though heroism in battle was the dominant *rasa* of the story as a whole, in *The Vision of Vāsavadattā* it manifested itself as the heroism of sacrifice and duty. It was a problem in staging *The Vision of Vāsavadattā* to decide whether to treat this facet of heroism as the dominant *rasa*, or to use love in separation as the dominant *rasa*. Though the first five acts out of six were concerned with love in separation, the electrifying effect of the call to war at the end of the fifth act reasserts the dominance of the heroic *rasa*. One cannot defy the *rasa* structure that the playwright has built into the play.

In ancient India the two plays would probably have been presented in a continuous cycle spreading over about two weeks, so that the movement from one *rasa* to the next would be natural. For a modern audience, this could hardly be a viable proposition. The production of only the latter half of the story of Udayana had a decisive effect on all the aspects of its presentation. In a much shorter span of action the actor had to establish not only his character but also make it enriching enough to sustain the empathy of the audience. The situation demanded a heavy dependence on the use of improvisation, which would only be possible for an actor well versed in such a dramatic form. In this context it should be remembered that it is the emotional expression in acting (*sāttvika abhinaya*) that motivates all the other dimensions of acting. While its structural framework is predetermined by the text of the play, enough room is purposely left for the actor's improvisations. The analogy for this practice can be found in classical Indian music. The element of improvisation plays an important role in all the surviving traditional forms in India.

At Hawaii this could scarcely be done, of course. It was not easy for the actors to identify themselves with the characters they were playing. For them, the problem of identification was both at the level of the technique and the idea. At the first reading of the play, the students reacted against the basic optimism and lack of conflict. Some of them considered the script suitable only for children's theater. They had to be introduced to a world view and social ethics of a culture very different from their own. Eventually, however, most of them were able to understand and even to appreciate the unfamiliar ethos of this play.

*The Vision of Vāsavadattā* belongs to one of the most complex genres developed by the ancient Indian theater, known as *nāṭaka*. In it, we find all the dramatic tendencies (*vṛtti*), in different degrees, integrated to form a complex whole. In the Hawaii production of *The Vision of Vāsavadattā*, the delicate tendency was emphasized, in spite of the fact that the spectacular tendency (*ārabhaṭṭ vṛtti*) could have helped in bridging the gap between the two plays, *The Vow of Yaugandharāyaṇa* and *The Vision of Vāsavadattā*. The spectacular tendency facilitates the evocation of heroism while the delicate tendency evokes the tenderness of love. It enables one to explore the possibility of strengthening the heroism of sacrifice and duty by juxtaposing it with the melancholy tenderness of love. By emphasizing the attractiveness of what they were giving up, the quality of sacrifice and duty in all the major characters of the play was enhanced.

The choice of the delicate tendency (*kaiśikī vṛtti*) helped both the director and the actors. It provided a framework within which one did not have to depend on the improvisational capacity of the actor. One could resort to a more structured form of expression as often as possible. For instance, when Padmāvatī enters with her friends playing with a ball, the whole sequence was played as a dance. The ethos of the play at this point was easier to convey due to the structuring provided by the dance element. Also, in the case of the scene in which Vāsavadattā hears of the marriage of her beloved Udayana to her own companion, and while she weaves a garland of flowers for the bridegroom, the element of dance was once again introduced. She remembers moments from her own past, realizes the reality that faces her, and, as she speaks, allows herself to be carried by the music. Thus, without adding a single word to the text of the play, the emotional content of the author's words was underlined through stylized movements and music.

Probably in the ancient theater these scenes would have emphasized the literary tendency (*bhārati vṛtti*). The same purpose was achieved here through the delicate tendency. It may be noted here that both these scenes received the spontaneous response of the audience and were considered to be especially moving. They also prepared the way for the dream sequence of *Vāsavadattā* in which the delicate tendency has its most rightful place.

In the translation of the play great care was taken to convey through an American idiom the original intention of the playwright. As the evocation of *rasa* is the main purpose of a Sanskrit play, the audience must be helped to understand and appreciate Bhāsa's words if they are to have any emotional rapport with and taste the subtleties of its *rasa* structure. Except for minor omissions and adaptations in the modes of addressing different characters and their exclamations, the original text was not changed. The balance between the prose and the verse was carefully maintained, and all of Bhāsa's verses rendered in English which followed the syllable count of the various verse forms (see my notes and the script). A specific melodic line was given to each verse form, enabling different characters to sing, recite, or chant their verses in the meters used by Bhāsa. The actors worked hard to learn the word patterns that were used, and were able to produce the desired effect, both in relation to the intentions of the playwright and their rapport with the audience.

The *rasa* association guided the color scheme of the production as a whole, especially of the costumes and makeup. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* clearly states that the actor's face should be decorated with suitable designs. Its mention of painting the actor's body need not be taken literally and may not be suitable for all plays. However, the makeup must underline the highly stylized (*nāṭyadharmin*) quality of the production while assisting the actors in establishing their characters. The decision to paint the bodies of the actors was taken after trying out several alternatives to serve this purpose. This practice is still being followed in some traditional forms like the Rās Līlā and also by folk dancers on certain occasions in India.

Udayana, the hero of this play, is a noble character with artistic temperament (*dhīra lalita nāyaka*). Although he is the main support (*aśraya*) of heroism in the story as a whole, in *The Vision of Vāsavadattā* he is the support of the love in separation (*vipralambha śṛṅgāra*). His costume, therefore, had a base of orange color

which is associated with the heroic (*vīra*) *rasa*, with a significant proportion of purple, the color of love (*śṛṅgāra*), and tinged with gray, the color of pathos (*karuṇa* *rasa*). His costume was designed to be harmonious and sober. His body was painted, head to toe, in purple, and large facial decorations were used to accent the character's pride and position.

Vāsavadattā is the cause of the arousal (*ālambanavibhāva*) of romantic love (*kāma śṛṅgāra*). During the physical separation from her husband, emotionally she comes closer to him. While she is the heroine separated from her lover (*proṣitabhartṛkā nāyikā*), she becomes completely assured of her husband's love (*svādhīna-patikā nāyikā*) in spite of his second marriage during the play. Her colors in this production were gray and purplish magenta which expressed her love in separation.

Padmāvati is the cause (*ālambanavibhāva*) of bringing in the element of the love of convenience (*artha śṛṅgāra*). She was given a glittering costume heavily ornamented with gold which spoke of her wealth and position. However, temperamentally she is sweet, patient, and devoid of jealousy (*dhīrā nāyikā*). Therefore, no trace of vulgarity was allowed to sneak into her costume and makeup.

Red predominated the color scheme of the costumes and of the makeup of the guards because this color is associated with the angry mood (*raudra* *rasa*) and martial spirit. The *vidūṣaka* was dressed in white with a dash of yellow with designs of the same color on his body. White is associated with laughter or gaiety (*hāsyā* *rasa*). The costumes of the two chamberlains had red and yellow to express their concern with the material well-being of their masters and their positions of authority.

As far as the line of the costumes is concerned, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* advises us to follow the fashions of the country and the period. Obviously, even in Bhāsa's time people in different regions of the Indian subcontinent wore different types of costumes. For example, in the production, Vāsavadattā was dressed as a woman of Avanti, in a style different from that of Padmāvati who was from the state of Magadha. What, exactly, was the difference in these two styles is not clear from the text of the play. Sculpture, with its emphasis on the line of the body, tends to make the costumes as transparent as possible, reducing their details to the minimum. Paintings in this respect can be better guides, especially when they are seen in conjunction with the sculpture of a given period. Unfortunately, very

few examples of sculpture or painting are so far available to us from the pre-Mauryan period (third century B.C.) which perhaps was nearer to Bhāsa's time. The line drawings from the caves of Sītābengā (second century B.C.) and the ninth cave of Ajantā (first century B.C.), as well as the sculpture of Sāñchī and Bhārhut (second century B.C.) and the photographs of the recent excavations at Kauśāmbī, the ancient capital of the Kingdom of Vatsa over which the hero of the play ruled, were consulted in choosing the costumes for the play. Women of the upper classes did not wear any garment above their waist, covering their breasts with a wide variety of necklaces. There is a medallion in the museum at Allāhābād which is near the ruins of Kauśāmbī, depicting the elopement of Vāsavadattā with Udayana on an elephant while the jester hangs on to the tail of the animal. This too was a useful source of reference for the designing of the costumes and the headdresses of the main characters.

The women of that time wore either a two- or three-piece costume made up of pieces of unstitched cloth. The main part of the costume was a broad piece of cloth, worn waist downwards, saronglike, with a number of variations in style. Another piece was draped over the two shoulders and fell low over the breasts. The third piece was worn by some women as a sash over their breasts, front to back. Only the foreign girls serving at the courts as dancers or attendants wore a stitched upper garment with long sleeves. In some communities in India, women, until very recently, wore the upper garment only after marriage. However, practical considerations like the susceptibility of the audience and the actresses had to play a part in the final selection of the costumes, and the three-piece costume was chosen.

The only stage property used in the production, and which forms a legitimate part of the *dhārya abhinaya*, was a single unobtrusive wooden seat. This prop served as a seat of the *tāpasī* (Hermit Woman) in the first act, as a stone bench in the second and the fourth acts, as a bed in the fifth act, and as a royal seat in the last act. This being a *nāṭyadharmin* production, hand props were also reduced to the basic minimum. The *cidūṣaka*, for instance, was given a crooked staff of liana vine. It accentuated his incongruous position in the play. For the rest, all allusions to reality were mimed. This included flowers in the garden, buzzing bees, the weaving of garlands, shooting of arrows, and bouncing the ball. •

When the sets were designed, the main consideration was to approximate the physical and architectural resources of the rectangular theater described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. As mentioned earlier, *The Vision of Vāsavadattā* being a play of the most complex genre known as *nāṭaka*, the zonal divisions required for its presentation can be best provided by the rectangular rather than the square or the triangular playhouse. The total area of a medium size playhouse according to the *Nāṭyaśāstra* was 96' × 48'. This was equally divided into two squares of 48' × 48'—one for the auditorium and the other for the stage. The plinth of the stage could be about one-and-a-half to two feet. The audience sat on ascending tiers facing the actors. The pillars supporting the roof created side lobbies for the movement of the actors on the stage. From the point of view of the audience, the decorative downstage pillars looked like three frames in which pictures created by the colorful actors continuously emerged and dissolved. This frontal juxtaposition between the actors and the audience in a rectangular theater is in essence the same as in a modern proscenium theater. At Kennedy Theater, many basic elements of the Sanskrit stage were obtained: a central rectangular acting area of 24' × 12', four supplementary acting areas created on the sides by an arrangement of pillars, a back wall with a door right and a door left, a raised area at the rear of the stage, and a musicians' platform.

The height of the raised area upstage (*raṅgaśīrṣa*) was reduced to nine inches, and the upstage rectangle where the musicians sat was raised by six inches and was surrounded by a railing as is done in the temples of South India. As *The Vision of Vāsavadattā* is written in a delicate (*sukumāra*) lyrical style, construction of a false decorated roof, involving considerable labor and expense, was not insisted upon. Instead, a canopy supported by four additional pillars was raised over the musicians to give their instruments more resonance. In the absence of the false roof, the two central pillars downstage were considered nonfunctional and were thus omitted in the interest of the sight lines of the auditorium, although there was an effect on the appearance of the picture frames in relation to which the blocking was initially planned for the production. The central pillars between the area downstage (*raṅgapīṭha*) and the area upstage (*raṅgaśīrṣa*) were retained for their symbolic use in the production but their height was considerably reduced.

Sanskrit drama does not observe the three unities in the sense meant by Aristotle, but it does lay a great stress on the unity of impact. A Sanskrit play may cover a period of several years but any given act of the play includes events only of one day. Locale however, may change as often as is required within a single act. Conventions of the physical theater are closely related to Sanskrit dramatic structure. All the characters must leave the stage at the end of each act. The lights need not be dimmed to suggest a time lapse, but the musicians must continue to play so as to establish the transition between the mood of the preceding act and the one that follows. A stylized walk (*parikramaṇa*) together with a verbal description spoken by the character is sufficient to suggest a change of a locale. This convention still survives in most of the traditional theater forms in India today. The type of stylization however, differs with each form. In *The Vision of Vāsavadattā* at Hawaii, the Kūṭiyāṭṭam style was adopted for the stylized walk from one locale to another.

There was no front curtain in the ancient Indian theater, nor was there any curtain dividing the area downstage from the area upstage. The entire stage area of 48' × 24', in front of the backstage (*nepathya*) wall was visible to the audience from the beginning right through to the end of the performance. The only curtains on the stage were those covering the two doors on the back wall and a small eight-by-four-foot rectangular curtain called *javanikā*, which was held by hand by the stage assistants during the entries and exits of the characters.

Stage directions like "enter Hermit Woman sitting" can be followed with the help of the movable curtain. "So and so entered with the agitated toss of a curtain," may refer to this movable curtain or to the curtain covering the back doors. This convention still exists in some traditional forms of South India, for example, Kūṭiyāṭṭam, Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam, Kuchipudi, Yakshagāna. The text of *The Vision of Vāsavadattā* clearly indicates the use of the hand curtain (*javanikā*) in the first act when the Hermit Woman enters seated, and in the last act when the hero orders the removal of the curtain in order to see Vāsavadattā. One of the ancient commentators suggests that a veil covering the face can also serve the same purpose in the last act. In this production, however, the hand curtain, about 6' × 4' and held by two assistants, was used in both the cases. It was also used for emphasizing the first entry of Vāsavadattā and

Yaugandharāyaṇa in the manner it is used in South Indian forms. For the first entry of Padmāvatī and her retinue in Act I, it was used as a canopy as is sometimes done in the Jashnabhand form of Kashmir.

The zonal division (*kaṣṣyāvibhāga*) is not rigidly laid down. There is no tangible construction, or lines erected for any given play, to divide the acting area. A character entering first would, by his movement, identify certain areas with different parts of a locale. Characters who entered later would confirm this area demarcation in their speech and movement. There are no explicit rules about the entry and the exit of characters. However, in most existing traditional theater forms in India, the characters enter from the door on the actor's right and exit from the one on the left, which we did in most cases.

A Sanskrit play starts with the preliminary preparation and invocation (*pūrvavarāṅga*) of all the elements necessary for a performance. This prepares the audience for the play that is to be performed. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* gives in great detail instructions for this part of the performance. Even though these were not written into the script of Bhāsa's play, they must be considered an essential part of its performance: they set the initial tone for an appreciation of the play. In most traditional theater forms preliminaries exist in one form or another, though not in their entirety as described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. For *The Vision of Vāsavadattā* we tried to rediscover the *pūrvavarāṅga* in their original form as far as was possible.

In our production, the initial ceremony began with drumbeats and the entry of the orchestra of four musicians. The orchestra, after they settled down and tuned their instruments, played a short introductory piece that set the mood of the play. Stage assistants then entered to cleanse the stage by sprinkling water on it. They lighted the oil lamps by the pillars and burned incense to purify the air. The leading actress then made an offering of flowers to the deity of the stage, paid homage to the musicians and their instruments, and offered her respects to the audience.

Next, the stage manager, the *sūtradhāra*, or the one who holds the strings of the play and has been responsible for the training of the actors and direction of the play, introduces the audience to the ethos of the play through appropriately chosen verses, which he chants. The verses he chose were not a part of the written text of the play but were chosen for the production of *The Vision of Vāsa-*



*vadattā* to establish a mood of calm conviction, noble melancholy, and solemn resolve.

The stage manager was accompanied by two stage assistants, one of whom carried an earthen pot filled with water, and the other the flag of Lord Indra (the god of rain). The flag of Lord Indra is associated with the legend of the beginning of drama and is considered to be a symbol of protection to the performers. It has retained its ritualistic significance in the preliminaries of the play (*pūrvarāṅga*). In the past, the raising of the flag on a tall pole may have served the purpose of announcing to the invitees that the play was about to start. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* describes various phases of these preliminaries, which include the worship of this flag. Today, we do not know what this flag looked like. In some surviving traditional forms the assistants make a round of the stage with a tiny red or orange triangular flag in hand. Others use a long pole. Considering its ceremonial significance, effort was made to enhance the flag's visual impact and dignity in this production. Lord Indra is associated with the rainbow. Several circular rings bearing rows of tiny flags of seven colors were attached to the upper half of the pole, which was eight feet long, in a tapering order. The topmost ring had purple flags and the base had the orange colors associated with the dominant *rasa* of the play. This was carried solemnly to the four corners of the stage.

The flag was then fixed close to the audience, and the stage manager led the invocation. The stage, now sanctified through the invocation, provided an appropriate atmosphere of communion and harmony between the audience and the actors. Finally, the stage manager ended the ceremony by narrating the first half of the duology—the story line of *The Vow of Yaugandharāyaṇa*—so that the audience would know what action had preceded *The Vision of Vāsavadattā*.

No *dhruvā* songs were incorporated into the presentation of *The Vision of Vāsavadattā* at Hawaii. The instrumental music, especially drums and flutes, was used to highlight the exits, entries, and the special moments in the play. The orchestra accompanied the movements and walks as well as the songs of the characters. The choice of the instruments took into account the fact that while percussion instruments have, more or less, retained their ancient character, string instruments like harps and lutes have changed consid-

crably. Only plucked stringed instruments, not bowed ones, were used. An attempt was also made to approximate the chanting of verses in their original meters. However, the melodic structure had to be based on the comparatively older and simpler *rāga* as no other feasible alternative was forthcoming.

The audience in Hawaii often gets an opportunity to see traditional Japanese and Chinese theater, but this was perhaps their first exposure to a *rasa*-oriented ancient Indian play. They were enchanted by the exotic quality of the *dhārya abhinaya* in this production, but their response to the script, as such, was mixed. Those who were conditioned to expect the tensions of Western drama were dissatisfied with the smooth emotional curve of the play. To some, its social ethics were not acceptable. On the other hand, it was a pleasant surprise to meet a group of twenty to twenty-five spectators after almost every performance who were eager to share an experience which was so unusual to them. One of them said that this play expressed something which he had felt within himself all the time without realizing it. A group of young people expressed a feeling that it is good to know that such human relationships are possible.

For me personally, this production of *The Vision of Vāsavadattā* at Hawaii was a rewarding as well as a revealing experience. It would be reasonable to have expected a negative, or at best a hesitant, response to this play; but the positive response that came from a large number of spectators perhaps reflects the changing mood of our times. Having taken the first step towards the exploration of the universe, perhaps it is high time that man puts his own house, on this earth, in order. The intercultural learning process has now acquired a practical significance. One may not necessarily adopt alien cultures but one must understand them and learn to appreciate the values they represent.

To those who have still not lost their faith in the future of man, a *rasa*-oriented play has something to offer. This need not mean the acceptance of social values and ethics of the ancient world. Modern writers can write *rasa*-oriented plays on contemporary themes. They can benefit from the study of the dramatic structure of Sanskrit classics. It would be interesting to have a writers' workshop for this purpose.

The relevance of ancient Sanskrit plays in modern times will continue to be debated at various levels. Is it necessary to revive a dead theater? Even if it were desirable to do so, *can* it be done? Can it be reconstructed as it was in the past? Perhaps not. But a serious attempt at its rediscovery may help the emergence of new forms rooted in their own soil. Attempts by some people in the modern Indian theater, chasing novelty for the sake of novelty, tend to degenerate into mere stunts and gimmicks. They cannot succeed in evoking a spontaneous response from the collective subconscious of their audience. The theater in modern India has yet to play the vital role that it did in ancient times. At least for India, the relevance of rediscovering its own past should no longer raise any serious doubts.

Rediscovery of the ancient Indian theater has a relevance not only for modern theater in India, but also for those countries in Asia which are in search of their identity and are anxious to forge links with their past. Some aspects of the *rasa*-oriented theater can have a universal appeal. It may be relevant for the world theater to explore this lost tradition while evolving a common ethos for the world of tomorrow. After all, this tradition does embody in itself the experience of a culture in which more than one-fifth of mankind is still rooted. This, if nothing else, should be enough to motivate an international effort in this direction. If the current urge for peace leads to an era of coexistence and cooperation, it is within the realm of possibility that the young citizens of the world may get more and more interested in the *rasa*-oriented theater with its emphasis on synthesis and consensus.

## Notes

1. Bhāsa was one of the most important playwrights of ancient India, who probably lived in 450 B.C. Out of his thirteen surviving plays, *The Vision of Vāsavadatta* is the best, and has remained popular for centuries. Bhāsa has explored most of the major genres evolved by the ancient Indian theater and may have contributed towards their development. He undoubtedly influenced the writers coming after him. He is loved for his humanism, characterization, and simple, lucid style.
2. *Dhṛta* refers to several positive qualities that a character must have in order

to become the hero of a Sanskrit play, or the *nāyaka*. He must have adequate moral courage to overcome all the obstacles coming in the way of his achieving his objective without losing his emotional balance, dignity, or the basic nobility of his character. Within this framework, the hero may exhibit temperamental differences: *dhīra lalita nāyaka* is a hero distinguished for his aesthetic qualities (Udayana was this kind of hero); *dhīrodatta nāyaka* is a hero with excessive self-confidence bordering on arrogance; *dhīra nāyikā* is a heroine with a sweet temper who is patient and devoid of jealousy. Padmavati was this type of heroine.

3. *Arthopakṣepaka* are the linking devices used in ancient Sanskrit drama to make its structure compact and complete. Information which is dramatically uninteresting or not feasible enough to be included in the main acts, and which may not help the smooth progression of the dramatic action but is necessary for following the story line, is given to the audience through five linking devices: Introductory scenes (*viśkambhaka*) give the essential background of important events through the characters of adequate status who are likely to possess such information. In *The Vision of Vāsavadattā*, such a scene comes before the beginning of Act VI. Connecting scenes (*praveśaka*) can be used only between two acts for giving information about events that occurred during the period that separates the two acts. In *The Vision of Vāsavadattā* such scenes come before Acts II, IV and V. The remaining three linking devices are offstage announcements (*cūlika*), the continuation of the last scene of the preceding act into the beginning of the next act (*aṅkāvatāra*), and a reference to an event in the act that follows (*aṅkasya*). Neither the hero nor the heroine directly participates in the linking scenes.
4. *Abhi*, literally, means toward the root; *ni* means to lead; thus, *abhinaya* is that which leads toward. As a technical term in dramaturgy it covers everything that an actor does and uses on the stage in order to convey the meaning of the play to the spectators and evoke a joyful consciousness (*rasa*) in them. It includes acting, makeup, costumes, and decor.
5. A Sanskrit verse is regulated by quantity and not by accent as English verses are. This was one of the major problems that had to be faced in translating *The Vision of Vāsavadattā* for the production at Hawaii, where the attempt was to retain as much of the original flavor as possible. A stanza usually consists of two or four quarters. A quarter is regulated either by the number of syllables or by syllabic instants. The quality of a syllable is determined by its vowel. A syllable with a short vowel is called heavy. There are fifty-seven stanzas in *The Vision of Vāsavadattā*, with eleven different meters as follows.

Name and characteristics of the meter used	Number and place where the meter is used
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#### *Anuṣṭubh*

has two lines, four quarters with eight syllables, for each of which the sixth is long and the fifth is short. The seventh syllable in the second and fourth quarter is long. There will be a pause at the end of every quarter. The meter is regulated by the number of syllables.	Act I: verses 2, 7, 10, 15
	Act IV: verses 21, 23, 24, 25
	Act V: verses 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36
	Act VI: verses 41, 44, 45, 47, 49, 50, 51, 52, 54, 55, 56, 57
	Total: twenty-six verses

Name and characteristics of the meter used	Number and place where the meter is used
<b>Āryā</b> is regulated by the syllabic instants; has two lines and four quarters. Syllabic instants are twelve in the first quarter, eighteen in the second, twelve in the third, and fifteen in the fourth. The pause comes at the end of each quarter.	Act I: verse 1 Act IV: verses 19, 20 Total: three verses
<b>Upendravajra</b> is regulated by the number of syllables; has four lines with eleven syllables in each and four quarters with a pause at the end of each.	Act V: verse 38 There is only one verse in this meter.
<b>Upajāti</b> is regulated by the number of syllables; has four lines with eleven syllables in each. The pause comes at the end of each of its four quarters.	Act V: verse 30 There is only one verse in this meter.
<b>Śalini</b> is regulated by the number of syllables; has four lines with eleven syllables in each and has four quarters. The pause is at the fourth syllable	Act I: verse 13 Act IV: verse 22 Act VI: verse 48 Total: three verses
<b>Vaiśvadevī</b> is regulated by syllables; has four lines with twelve syllables in each. The pause is at the fifth syllable.	Act I: verse 9 There is only one verse in this meter.
<b>Vasantatilakā</b> is regulated by syllables; has four lines with fourteen syllables in each. The pause comes at the end of the eighth syllable. The scheme of the vowels in the line is: long, long, short, long, short, short, short, long, short, short, long, short, short.	Act I: verses 4, 6, 11 Act IV: verse 18 Act V: verses 26, 27, 28 Act VI: verses 40, 42, 43, 53 Total: eleven verses
<b>Śikharinī</b> is regulated by syllables; has four lines with seventeen syllables in each. The pause comes at the sixth syllable. The scheme of the vowels in the line is: short, long, long, long, long, long, short, short, short, short, short, long, short, long, long, short, long.	Act I: verses 14, 16 Total: two verses
<b>Harinī</b> is regulated by syllables; has two lines with seventeen syllables in each. The pause comes at the sixth and tenth syllables. The arrangement of vowels is: short, short, short, short, short,	Act VI: verse 46 There is only one verse in this meter.

Name and characteristics of the meter used	Number and place where the meter is used
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long, long, long, long, long, short, long, short,  
short, long, short, long.

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**Śardūlavikṛtita** (roar of the lion)

is regulated by syllables; has four lines with nineteen syllables in each. The pause comes at the twelfth syllable. The vowel arrangement is: long, long, long, short, short, long, short, long, short, short, short, long, long, long, short, long, long, short, short.

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Act I: verses 3, 8, 12  
Act IV: verse 17  
Act V: verses 29, 37  
Total: six verses

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**Puṣpitaḡra**

is regulated by syllables; has four lines; twelve syllables are used in the first and the third line; thirteen syllables are used in the second and fourth lines. The pause comes at the end of each quarter.

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Act I: verse 5  
Act VI: verse 39  
Total: two verses

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6. *Āśraya*, literally, means giving protection. As a technical term in dramaturgy it refers to the hero of a play without whose support a dormant basic urge of a spectator cannot surface to a conscious level and eventually transform itself into the joyful consciousness of its respective *rasa*.

# Sanskrit Drama as an Aggregate of Model Situations

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M. Christopher Byrski

THE FIRST THEATERS in Europe to lend their stages to exotic themes were those of the Jesuit colleges. In Poland, at such places like Lublin and Lwow, by the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries, plays dealing with spectacular exploits of missionaries were staged. We can safely suppose similar occurrences all over Europe.<sup>1</sup> By the middle of the eighteenth century and especially in the latter half of it, similar exotic plays, though no longer concerned with religious missionaries or confined to the Jesuit colleges, appeared all over Europe. The best example might be the notorious *Indian Widow* which, under different titles and in different versions, circulated in theaters of Europe, being everywhere apparently extremely well received by the public.<sup>2</sup> In spite of the fact that such plays presented a highly adulterated picture of India, or rather, because of that very shortcoming, the European public should have been well prepared to welcome genuine Indian drama. Consequently, it comes rather as a surprise that, when in 1789 William Jones for the first time translated the *Sacountala* of Kālidāsa which was rendered two years later into German by Georg Förster, it was not followed by an outburst of interest on the part of the European theater. The staging of *Śakuntala* and other Sanskrit dramas remains sparse to this day, and often when attempted, dissolves into meaningless pageantry or evolves into a completely un-Indian novel theatrical performance.<sup>3</sup>

The reason behind that situation is not very difficult to find. With what might be called "exoticism" on the European stage, we

molded our rather modest knowledge of India into something which we Europeans could understand and with which we could easily identify. Consequently, such plays as the *Indian Widow* presented a picture which, apart from a few exotic and often wrongly applied names and faces of the chief protagonists covered with brownish makeup, did not contain any other apparent Indian features. Indian heroes and heroines as well as villains in those plays behaved in perfectly European ways, and I presume that if among the audience there had been an Indian, he would have most probably wondered why Europeans chose this pseudo-Indianness in order to show themselves to themselves.

If I could answer his query, I would say that it is deeply ingrained narcissism which bars one man from meaningful contact with another man. Most often we have been more interested in ourselves in India than in India herself. From personal experience I know that to break that shell is not easy. Yet it is an absolute condition of any real encounter. Otherwise we shall endlessly gaze at our own image simply dressed up in an Indian costume, which is hardly faithfully copied at that! This danger threatens not only Westerners writing and producing exotic plays supposedly about India. It also applies to the production of original Indian plays. Our critical apparatus is not geared to appreciate and judge those aspects of the ancient Indian theatrical tradition that determine its peculiarly Indian character. Consequently, we try to see in Indian plays the same values (or their absence) which we are used to appreciating in the infamous *Indian Widow*. The resulting products only testify to the sad fact of basic misunderstanding. For original Sanskrit dramas (even in translation) yield themselves neither to an operetta-type of interpretation nor to any other known to Westerners. Thus, it is precisely here that we have to look for the reasons why original Sanskrit dramas did not appeal to the general public in a way comparable to our own pseudo-Indian plays.

It may not be out of place to add here that the perfect innocence of Westerners with regard to classical Indian theatrical conventions of staging plays contributed in no small measure to our overall failure to understand and appreciate those plays. Therefore, our main effort should go in two directions: first, we have to determine those values which not only constitute the "otherness" of Sanskrit drama but which also constitute its *raison d'être* in the repertoire of Western theater; and second, we should pinpoint cor-



responding aspects of Indian theatrical convention that pertain to performance. But this last problem will remain for the time being outside the present study.

To my mind, the values in question lay in the fact that each Sanskrit drama represents an aggregate of model situations peculiar to the ancient Indian *weltanschauung*. Yet before I try to elucidate this concept of model situations, I should like to repeat an argument regarding the need to understand Sanskrit drama properly, which though commonplace, bears repetition at this point. That one man can no longer ignore another man is the argument often repeated by the great and the insignificant. "Not to ignore" implies an active attitude of trying to know one's fellow man in happiness and in misery, in victory and in failure, in sum, in basic or model existential situations.

One of the definitions of the art of theater to be found in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* says that the art of theater is no more and no less than the nature of the world with its happiness and despair represented through acting.<sup>4</sup> This alone is enough to prove my point that in the form of a Sanskrit drama we have an aggregate of these model situations which, when lived through by our fellow man, show him to us in his bare humanness.

Let me now drop these general divagations and present my main thoughts. Sanskrit drama as an aggregate of model situations is considered in chapter 21 of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The term used in this connection is *itirṛtta*. Suggesting an interpretation of this word on the same lines with the well-known interpretation of the word *itihāsa* (history), I would render it in English as meaning "so it happened." Here it will not so much denote any particular event of the past as the essence of each happening—its inner structure or sequence.

The elaborate structure of the plot (which is the term I shall use for *itirṛtta*)<sup>5</sup> is built of two categories of elements. The first category is an idea of pure action, called *kārya*. It constitutes the basis of a plot and it is divided into five phases (*avasthā*). First comes the beginning (*ārambha*) phase with its most important feature the desire to act (*autsukya*). Next comes the effort (*yatna*) phase and, as its very name indicates, it is characterized by a concrete effort undertaken as a result of the desire to act. The third phase is called the phase of hope (*prāptiyāśā*). It is here that, as the result of earlier effort, a hope of attainment of fruit is born. The final, fifth phase of

fruition (*phalāgama*) is divided from that of hope by the fourth phase of frustration (*niyatāpti*).<sup>6</sup> Concluding the description of the phase-scheme of action, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* emphasizes that it is a universal concept applicable to every action.<sup>7</sup> Certainly there can be no action born of desire and aiming at its fulfillment which does not pass through these phases. The universality of this concept can be acknowledged, although to a Westerner its optimism might be a trifle presumptuous.

The idea elaborated above constitutes the backbone of the plot, the flesh of which—to continue this comparison—is the fivefold nature of the subject matter (*arthaprakṛti*). The phase-scheme describes action in its duration; the nature of the subject matter scheme describes its texture or “thickness.” The most important element of the latter scheme is called the germ (*bīja*). It is the germinal, main matter of the plot. At the beginning it is as small as a seed, and grows or thickens to fruition while an action progresses. This is the most important aspect of the fivefold nature of the subject matter. The remaining four only describe it more minutely. For example, a drop (*bindu*), the second aspect of the nature of the subject matter, stands for the continuity of action or for its uninterrupted flow. The next two categories described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* are external to the germ in as much as they do not belong to it but only help in its progression and development from the outside. The first is the subsidiary plot (*patākā*) and the second is an episode (*prakāṛi*) or, perhaps better, a chain of episodes which may be inserted whenever necessary. The important stipulation of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* regarding the subsidiary plot is that it cannot last beyond the fourth phase of action. Finally, there comes the last aspect of the nature of the subject matter with which we have already become familiar in its capacity of fivefold-phased action. Action (*kārya*) as an element of the nature of the subject matter is not expressed in the form of the five phases. To the contrary, it is rather the continuous spirit of enterprise which is stressed here, an urge necessary to complete an action. Thus, while vertical division of the plot is supplied by the phase-scheme, its horizontal division, or rather its texture, is characterized by the fivefold nature of the subject matter.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, the phase-scheme projected onto the entire manifold nature of the subject matter gives, in effect, a new category of five spans (*sandhi*) of plot. The first span, characterized by the variety

of elements, witnesses the origin of germinal subject matter and is called a forehead span (*mukhasandhi*). The second, a head span (*pratimukhasandhi*), consists of the forceful manifestation of a germinal subject matter with the reservation that it is sometimes visible and sometimes out of sight. The third span is called a womb span (*garbhasandhi*); its characteristic feature is partial, or rather transitory, attainment of the fruit of action and the repeated search for it. The reflection span (*vimarśasandhi*) follows. There is temptation, anger, and disaster inherent in it. In the concluding accomplishment span (*nirvahanasandhi*), all the elements of action are brought together. The emotional integration inherent in a state of fulfilled desires duly ensues and the action ends.<sup>9</sup>

Even now, after the basic phase-scheme of action has been elaborated into the concept of the five spans, I can repeat my earlier conviction that it may be treated as a universal concept. At this stage its only explicitly Indian feature is its total optimism—a challengeable concept from the Westerner's point of view. Yet once seen against the broader background of ideas current in the Indian world at that time, it becomes an extremely interesting, not to say tantalizing, idea. Let me at this turn then, risk a very short exposition of these ideas. The *Ṛgveda* calls desire the first seed of mind.<sup>10</sup> A simultaneous coming into existence of desire and multiplicity, between which there exists a sort of feedback relationship, is the basic presupposition of this mode of thinking. Prajāpati, the Lord of Creatures, desired the second, and so the second came into being. The very occurrence of Prajāpati's desire brought into being the second and consequently, multiplicity. That original eruption of energy plays a very ambivalent role in the universe of its own creation. For it is both the *raison d'être* of multiplicity and the most powerful agent which aims at bringing this multiplicity to an end in perfect unity and stasis.

It seems that the *Nāṭyaśāstra* understands what it calls action (*kārya*) as an expression of the integrating aspect of desire. Dramatic action as well as every action indeed, according to this treatise, proceeds from multiplicity (*nānā* of the forehead span) to unity (*samānayana* of the accomplishment span). Thus the integration of the multiple is its main feature. In order to explain why it *has* to end in integration, I shall have to touch upon a problem which is of capital importance for ancient Indian thinking particular to the vedic period. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* calls dramatic perfor-

mance a sacrifice.<sup>11</sup> According to the *Brāhmaṇas*, discursive reality (precisely that multiplicity which emerged from undiversified Absolute—its becoming and its merger) is sacrifice. Everything that exists is sacrifice.<sup>12</sup> Here we can draw pairs of equations: stasis versus movement = unity versus diversity = Prajāpati versus sacrifice (*yajña*). In addition to that, it can be said that sacrifice when completed exhausts desire through its fulfillment. And what is its completion? It is the restoration of Prajāpati's plenitude as if infringed upon by the fact of creation. This restoration comes about through the offering of oblation in the sacrifice, which is yet another form of integration of the multiple. This is why both sacrifice and action have to end in integration. Otherwise it "would be a mutilated piece from the world of our experience—it would merely mean that the cycle has not been completed, or that it is only a partial view and not the whole. . . ."<sup>13</sup> Consequently, because the art of theater, through integrating desiring with desired, epitomizes on the stage the very same idea of a full cycle of existence, it has to end with the accomplishment span and it cannot be cut short at the reflection span.

I can add here that even death will not contradict this idea, for Indians insist that there is rebirth after which the cycle of existence can be completed. The *Śakuntala* of Kālidāsa is the best and most beautiful example of this manner of thinking. By the end of the reflection span both Śakuntalā and King Duṣyanta have departed from this world only to unite in heaven and to return to earth to complete what was cruelly interrupted by their adverse fate.<sup>14</sup>

I hope by now the particular Indian character of what I propose to call a situation model has become abundantly clear. Yet this is not all that the *Nāṭyaśāstra* has to say on the subject. After formulating the theory of spans it introduces still another category of "span-elements" (*sandhyāṅga*) which, in an even more precise and peculiarly Indian way, further defines Sanskrit drama as a situation model.

Sixty-four span-elements described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* reflect faithfully the basic division of the five phases. Their character confirms whatever has been already said about phases, including the controversial problem of the frustration phase. Broadly speaking the sixty-four span-elements can be divided into two categories. In the first belong all those which do not directly define the psychological implications of existential situations, but broadly indicate

in technical terms the development of the plot. A poet is free to charge them with whatever emotional content he wills. The remaining can be directly referred to existential situations and usually their emotional coloring is determined by their definitions. As it will be shown through an analysis of *The Vision of Vāsavadattā* of Bhāsa, they have not been understood by Sanskrit poets as single happenings following each other in the order they are discussed in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, but rather as motifs which may repeatedly reappear within one span or, even occasionally, outside it.

According to the span-element scheme, the first element of the forehead span is suggestion (*upakṣepa*). It can also be rendered allusion, mention, or hint. In the first span there invariably has to be an allusion to the central problem, that is, to the germinal matter of the plot. It is generally found right at the beginning of the play, but it may also be repeated later. Since action is a complex and diversified process, two further elements help a poet to understand it. These are help (*parikara*) and extension (*parinyāsa*). The first stresses the multiplicity and intricacy of coming events; the second, the origin of this complexity. An element of allurement (*vilobhana*), through a description of the virtues of the subject matter in hand, makes action additionally attractive, forcefully enticing attention.

During the course of the first span all elements of action should be sorted out and decisions made as to how it is to proceed. This element of action is called decision (*yukti*). Accession (*prāpti*) is another element of the structure of the plot which properly occurs during the forehead span. For it is precisely at this time that a suitable situation is determined which should be charged with optimism. This is closely related to the settling element (*samādhāna*) which marks the oncoming of the germinal matter of action. At this point the span-elements become less evidently connected with the technicalities of the plot structure; instead they define situations more explicitly in terms of their psychological charge. For arrangement (*vidhāna*) is supposed to infuse into an action an aspect of conflict consisting of happiness and despair.

From the point of view of the definition of theater quoted above, this seems to be one of the most important elements of the plot. Natural in such conditions is an element of reflection upon the complexity of life called contemplation (*paribhāvanā*), the effect of which should be, according to the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, excitement fol-

lowed by curiosity. Thus, the dual aspect of the matter of action obviously provokes an active attitude which makes the germinal matter grow or ascend and this constitutes an element of disclosure (*udbheda*). Now, an active attitude resulting from the element of contemplation fructifies in a concrete enterprise with regard to the matter of action, which thereby makes up another span-element called activity (*karana*). Further fragmentation of action and deepening of divisions among its participants makes an element of dissension (*bheda*) which apparently is considered a natural concomitant of the span-element called activity in the early stages of action. Thus ends the forehead span. All the while we should remember that the main tendency of it is an ardent desire, eagerness, and zeal (*autsukya*) but not without moments of anxiety and uneasiness.

The second span, in accordance with its basic tendency which is effort, lists as the first element manifestation (*vilāsa*), which means striving after love or any other satisfaction.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, a complementary span-element is introduced, that of pursuit (*parisarpa*) after an object of action (which at this stage most obviously cannot be in full view but alternately appears and disappears). Each pursuit tends to provoke resistance (*vidhūta*)—the next span-element mentioned in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*—indicating that it is only an initial resistance. Yet it is enough to cause perplexity (*tāpana*)—a span-element stemming largely from separation. This span-element, with its aspect of separation, ushers into the plot structure the delicate demeanor (*kaiśikī vṛtti*) which often characterizes such situations. Therefore the two following span-elements represent this demeanor exactly. The first is dalliance (*narman*), introducing mirth or laughter for the sake of amorous pastime. The second is the splendid dalliance (*narmadyuti*) which also brings mirth, but in order to cover up some fault, obviously in connection with love.

Another motif which the *Nāṭyaśāstra* considers characteristic of this span of the plot is conceived in the form of a span-element called an argument (*pragayana*) which is construed as reply upon reply. Although at this stage no serious setback should take place, some hindrance (*nirrodha*) may occur due to chance mishap. The span-element called pacification (*paryupāsana*) introduces into the plot a motif of conciliation of the angry, and it anticipates quite clearly the third, or womb, span. Politeness (*puṣpa*), particularly of a verbal type, should also characterize the second span of a plot.

But by no means should it be the only note of this chord which also includes a contrasting tune of obviously angry retort in the form of a span-element called thunderbolt (*vajra*). An announcement (*upanyāsa*), being a result of the deductive process, should also find its place within this span. The last element of the head span, the meeting of castes (*varṇasamhāra*) is of capital importance. As Abhinavagupta insists, we should understand the term figuratively, meaning that all the protagonists and antagonists of the play meet.<sup>16</sup> The analysis of *The Vision of Vāsavadattā* seems to point to the fact that what is meant here is not an actual scene in which all span-elements come together but rather a general tendency of this span to interconnect all the *dramatis personae* involved.

The middle, or womb, span should contain as its first element a fabrication (*abhūtāharaṇa*) consisting of deceitful words well balanced with a statement of truth in an element called right way (*mārga*). Now, as if connected with these conflicting elements, there is an element known as symptom (*rūpa*) which denotes a conjecture with regard to a collection of various matters. An exaggeration (*udāharaṇa*) is an element of a rather ornamental value, for it consists of exaggerated statements, but it does express well the high emotional charge of the middle span. Undoubtedly, the apogee of the womb span, as well as in a way of the entire plot, is marked by a span-element called chance (*krama*), for this element represents a motif of the attainment of what Abhinavagupta calls *paramārtha*, that is, the most coveted object of action but in a sort of partial, illusory, or mental way only. Such an optimistic note is most naturally accompanied by a motif of conciliation and generosity conceived as an element of propitiation (*saṃgraha*).

The atmosphere of this span is so charged with hope that desired shapes are readily inferred from surrounding shapes in a span-element called an inference (*anumāna*). An element of supplication (*prārthanā*), denoting a plea for love or joy, furnishes a festive mood for the happenings indicated in previous elements. An element of revelation (*ākṣipti*) of what has been so far hidden in the hearts of those participating in the action also characterizes the situation. Hope of attainment appears in full swing. But, after all, this is not yet the end of action—only its middle stage which is marked not by hope alone. Its other feature is the limitation of that hope. Consequently, the optimistic upward trend of the action has to be marred with outbursts of heartrending words in an element

named angry speech (*toṭaka*). This element marks the downward trend of the womb span expressed by the three remaining elements. Outwitting (*adhibala*) consists of overreaching through fraudulent moves and results in dangerous situations, which in turn cause fear of a king, an enemy, or a robber in the form of an element of excitement (*udvega*). The last element of the womb span, the so-called predicament (*vidrava*), caused by fear or terror links it with the subsequent span of reflection.

The fourth span, reflection, is concerned largely with frustration. Not unexpectedly, the very first element of the fourth span is a reproach (*apavāda*), which is nothing else but proclaiming a crime or offense. Such an element is in harmony with the one that follows—confrontation (*sampheta*), where angry words are exchanged. The next element in the same vein is that of insolence (*drava*), shown even to those who normally would command high respect. Conflicting emotions seem to pervade this entire span. Thus, the tense flow of action marked by the above elements is accompanied by conciliatory efforts aimed at a placation of opponents which make up an exertion (*śakti*) element. This in turn should be coupled with a perseverance or a determination (*vyavasāya*) element stemming from a vow. The conciliatory spirit, which might appear in several places in this rather tense span, is also expressed in an element called reverence (*prasaṅga*) when those deserving praise are shown due respect. Yet elements of contention are by no means overshadowed by these peaceful efforts. The element of dazzlement (*dyuti*), full of words of contempt, is closely connected with an element of distress (*kheda*), a natural concomitant to mental strain. This unrelenting pessimistic trend does not show signs of abating. The lowest ebb of action at the reflection span is marked with a forceful denial (*pratiśedha*) of all that has been desired. It is accompanied by an effective blockade (*virodhana*) of action almost beyond recovery. Almost, but a concurrent stream of events so characteristic of this span makes the action emerge from its tragic impasse by means of an effective grasping (*ādāna*) of the germ-oriented action. The rumblings of the just averted storm can still be heard in words of contempt, but apparently they are used rather for the sake of concealment (*chādana*) required by the exigencies of action. The last element listed anticipates with its optimism (*prarocana*) the last span of action by representing an integration process of so far rather diffused subject matter.



The *Nāṭyaśāstra* contains the observation that, in certain circumstances, the three inner spans can be dropped, leaving only the first and fifth.<sup>17</sup> The very first element of the fifth and final span, accomplishment, seems to give substance to this view, being a reappearance of the germinal matter in the same form it had in the forehead, or first, span. It is for this reason that this specific element is called, literally, span (*sandhi*). As we can see, the reflection span brings an obvious disruption of action. Therefore, one of the characteristic elements of the subsequent span must be a resumption of the play's action, and this is precisely formulated as an element called an awakening (*vibodha*). The element called assembling (*grathana*), to a degree concurrent, denotes setting about the different tasks still ahead. This tendency to brace oneself for action, which now emerges again from the low ebb of the fourth span, is connected with a certain retrospective tendency which is expressed among other ways in a narration (*nirṇaya*) element in which past experiences are retold. Such an element, of course, furnishes ample opportunity for a reprimand (*paribhāṣaṇa*), apparently of those who have been responsible for what happened during the reflection span. At the same time, this element marks an end to any tension which might have yet persisted. Now everything calms and the things achieved receive a final confirmation (*dhṛti*).

A collection of such matters makes up another element called bliss (*ānanda*). The final passing of misery is indicated by an element called deliverance (*samaya*). An element of delight (*prīti*) which follows is explained in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* as manifesting itself in the form of kindness consisting of reverence. The apogee of this span, from the point of view of its emotional content, has been conceived of as an element of mystery (*upagūhana*) which consists of the attainment of something wonderful (*adbhuta*). If we remember the stipulation of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* regarding the taste of wonder (*adbhuta rasa*),<sup>18</sup> then this is undoubtedly the moment of a play when the audience should experience catharsis (in its generic sense) at its highest pitch. Whatever is left in the way of action consists simply of winding up devices. (As a matter of fact a proper action is exhausted with the previous element of mystery.) The remaining sequence of action begins with an oration (*bhāṣaṇa*) having as its main theme conciliation and generosity. It is accompanied by an element of retrospect (*pūrvavākya*) reviewing, in short,

the matters already dealt with. The bestowal of a boon makes up what is called the termination element (*kāvya-samhāra*) of the play.<sup>19</sup>

Having thus reviewed the theory, it is a proper time to test it by applying it to an analysis of a concrete drama. Since *The Vision of Vāsavadattā* of Bhāsa was performed for us in this context, let me, for obvious reasons, try to see what we can learn about this one drama by applying the criteria presented above.

*The Vision of Vāsavadattā* is a *nāṭaka*, or a full-length drama, which therefore should contain all five spans of the plot structure described above. That it does is confirmed by a cursory, brief review which shows clearly its five spans. Let us see then, what a detailed analysis of both spans and span-elements will show.

The introductory scene immediately introduces a certain note of apprehension when the stage manager (*sūtradhāra*) informs the audience of the rather high-handed treatment bestowed on the inhabitants of a hermitage. It anticipates the dominant conflict of the play which appears to be the unavoidable clash between the two traditional aims of life, welfare (*artha*) and love (*kāma*), to the detriment of the third, virtue (*dharma*). The first scene ends with the entrance of the chamberlain of Magadha. The main protagonists of it are Yaugandharāyaṇa and Vāsavadattā. The latter, in her dejected frame of mind, brings to the surface crucial problems which, when elucidated upon by Yaugandharāyaṇa, become a veiled yet quite apparent *suggestion* as to the germ of the play. Vāsavadattā asks her companion on hearing the crude order of the two guards: "Who is it that turns us away in this manner?" "It is someone who turns himself away from virtue," answers Yaugandharāyaṇa.

Now, we should remember that the *summum bonum* of the Indian idea of human life is an attainment of the three ends of life (*trivarga*) mentioned above. Yaugandharāyaṇa perhaps is aware of the conflict which his actions have provoked. The conflagration of Lāvāṇaka and faked widowerhood for King Udayana had the single aim of reinstating the paramount power of Kauśāmbī, and thus love, in the form of Vāsavadattā, had to yield to the welfare of Kauśāmbī. A conclusion might follow that this infringement upon love puts the action in question in conflict with virtue. But if we remember the *dictum* of the *Kāma Sūtra* (1.2.15) that welfare is the main aim of a king<sup>20</sup> then we cannot unreservedly condemn the minister's machinations.

The next scene, in which we come to know Princess Padmāvati and the Vedic student, is of *help* in delineating the composite texture of the whole happening. Here we learn about the prophecy regarding Padmāvati's and Udayana's matrimony, witness the rise of her love for him, and come to know the details of the conflagration at Lāvāṇaka. Here also (v. 13) there is again a *suggestion* to be found that Vāsavadattā might not really be dead. The same portion of the story makes a sort of *extension* into the past, for from what happens on the stage we can infer that the present uneasy situation is due to Yaugandharāyaṇa's efforts to rebuild the Kauśāmbian empire. There can be no doubt that by the same token the plot becomes *alluring*, for by now its virtues are obvious. Bhāsa takes care (perhaps too much) to develop his plot in the first span in such a way that there can be no misgivings as to how it is going to proceed. The *decision* is taken by Yaugandharāyaṇa the moment he entrusts Vāsavadattā to the care of Padmāvati. From this, as well as from the prophecy which he has mentioned, we know that Udayana and Padmāvati have to become man and wife and we can infer that this will also bring the amelioration of Vāsavadattā's fate.

From our point of view this may appear a singularly nonthrilling technique of story-telling. Yet in India what is attractive about a well-known story is not what will happen, but how it will happen. The subject matter of a play is determined by these elements. *The Vision of Vāsavadattā* is infused with an optimism stemming from the fact that all the protagonists, through a series of initial moves, might hope for an *accession* of their aims. Thus, the main features of the entire action are *settled* and the germinal subject matter presented: out of the germ of the conflagration of Lāvāṇaka, out of the disguise of Vāsavadattā, and out of her sojourn with Padmāvati, the subsequent action will sprout. It is certainly very exciting to see how Bhāsa takes care of one of the most important elements of the forehead span, *arrangement*. He presents it as a conflict between happiness and despair. Padmāvati, the repository of virtue of whom it is twice said "dear to virtue" (*dharma-priya*) (v. 6) and "dear to those who are agreeable to virtue" (*dharma-bhirāmapriya*) (v. 8), represents harmony and happiness. Yaugandharāyaṇa, in his turn, seems indirectly to acknowledge that what he has done might appear as not quite in tune with virtue, for removing more or less forcibly someone from his place in a society, even if there is a certain irregularity about his or her right to this

place, and assuming an incognito means "to turn oneself away from virtue" (*dharmād ātmānam utsārayitum*). The fruit of such a deed has to be insult added to misery which Vāsavadattā so clearly experiences as a more or less consenting party to the plot.

In spite of what has been said above, the division of happiness and despair is not only external. It also colors the frame of mind of both Vāsavadattā and Padmāvati. Padmāvati's happiness is tarnished by apprehension regarding Udayana himself and his feelings, while Vāsavadattā's misery is brightened by proof of Udayana's great love for her. A *contemplation* of the complexity of life, which naturally excites curiosity, reverberates in the strophes recited by Yaugandharāyaṇa (vv. 3,4,15), by the Chamberlain (v. 10), and by the student (v. 13). A *disclosure* should be considered a general tendency of the first span. Bhāsa skillfully unveils the most important elements of the plot beginning with the rather symbolic disguise of Yaugandharāyaṇa and Vāsavadattā, through the appearance on the stage of Padmāvati, up to the revelations of the Vedic student. An *activity*, of course, full of enterprise and endeavor, throbs right through the first span, but its most pronounced moment is when Yaugandharāyaṇa requests Padmāvati to accept Vāsavadattā's guardianship. The forehead span should, as on a chessboard after initial moves, leave the situation fairly well outlined, the particular interests of all the protagonists and antagonists determined, and the degree of *dissension* defined.

Partly the ingenuity of Yaugandharāyaṇa and partly fate creates such a situation in which the rather conflicting interests of the two heroines are yoked together. Yet this seems to be a problem of secondary importance, for polygamy was a more or less normal thing. More important is the political undercurrent which runs concurrently. It is harmony rather than dissension that finally emerges from the situation. Unless we consider the description of past events—the conflagration of Lāvāṇaka and the disappearance of Vāsavadattā—to be a part of this span, we shall have to admit that the last span-element does not contain a very pronounced conflict.

At first glance it may seem, then, that Bhāsa's concept of the head span is rather unorthodox. Yet, the deviations in structure in the first span of this drama become justified when we acknowledge that the underlying theme of political intrigue (engineered by Yaugandharāyaṇa) is, in fact, the major theme in this play. In a way,

the four inner acts, representing the three inner spans of the plot, can be seen as merely the outer manifestations of that process which was initiated by Yaugandharāyaṇa during the first span. The vehemence and ruthlessness of the political intrigue has uprooted Vāsavadattā in whose fate it is reflected. Bhāsa seems to show how love (*kāma*), deprived of the clear sanction of virtue (*dharma*), fares when it has to yield to the exigencies of welfare (*artha*). Vāsavadattā's love for Udayana, first of all, was not legalized with the formal nuptial ceremony. But even had it been so, she would have had to agree to sacrifice it for the sake of forging an alliance with the kingdom of Magadha, thus reestablishing Kauśāmbian paramountcy. But while such a reason may explain her behavior it cannot absolve her from its ill effects. This is what Yaugandharāyaṇa indicates when he tells her that even gods when not recognized suffer privations.

But let us return now to the span-element analysis of the two acts of the second, or head, span. Aiming at love's fulfillment is an obvious *manifestation* of this part of the plot. The actual effort has been carried out behind the scenes by Minister Rumaṇvāt, who was responsible for having Udayana visit Magadha. What we see on the stage, however, is only an aftermath of those happenings. While Padmāvati is carried towards the fulfillment of her dreams, Vāsavadattā's grief grows, paradoxically at the same time that she too finds herself, incognito, close to her husband. Thus the pursuit of the object of the play's action is in this case a rather passive one. This very fact precludes from this span an element of *resistance*. Undoubtedly one of the major motifs of this span is *perplexity* stemming from separation which appears by the end of Act II and is developed in Act III. It would be rather difficult to pinpoint exactly the three following elements. The opening scene of Act II might be considered an *argument*, provided we do not expect too much of it. An element of *hindrance* followed up by *pacification* ends Act II when Vāsavadattā, learning of Udayana's decision to marry Padmāvati, derives comfort from the knowledge that it was not his initiative. Verbal *politeness* is an elusive element. We can, of course, insist that there are traces of it in the dialogue of Act II, yet neither the *Nāṭyaśāstra* nor Abhinavagupta sufficiently define this element.

Considering the easy flow of the action in this span it would be an obvious *tour de force* to indicate here a *thunderbolt* element.

There is no place for a really angry retort even from Padmāvati, who is certainly emotionally concerned about the forthcoming marriage. The only moment of this span where we could point to an *announcement* is when Padmāvati speaks of King Udayana being recognized by the inhabitants of Ujjayinī. She concludes with an announcement that it is good luck for a person to be agreeable to all others.

If we understand the last element, *the meeting of castes*, only as a concrete situation in which all *dramatis personae* appear together, then we shall have to admit that what we consider the head span does not contain this particular element. But if this one, as well as all other span-elements, is considered a motif or aspect of the plot, then the situation is different. For while the first span usually ends with a presentation of all participating in the plot, the second gives a chance to fasten the ties that bind them together. Thus the wedding of Udayana and Padmāvati both literally and figuratively brings together the main protagonists—although the hero himself is absent from the stage and his minister is an even more distant figure. As a matter of fact, whatever happens in the subsequent portions of the play happens as a consequence of what has taken place in the head span.

So far the span-elements in the second span representing the delicate demeanor are conspicuous by their absence from our analysis of this span in *The Vision of Vāsavadattā*. This has been done on purpose, for if we consider these elements as marking only the presence of an outright humor in a play—as M. M. Ghosh would suggest in his translation of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*—then we shall have to admit that it is very slightly pronounced in *The Vision of Vāsavadattā*. But if we take them as structural representatives of the delicate demeanor—this emanates clearly from the definitions of the four subdivisions of delicate demeanor—we shall have to concede in *The Vision of Vāsavadattā* that one of these span-elements—namely, *splendid dalliance*—has been conceived as framing the entire head span. The contents of both Act II and Act III seem to correspond to what splendid dalliance is supposed to be. In both acts, there is a touch of humor (rather tearful, though, in Act III) governing not so much some fault, as a knotty development of intrigue responsible for the situation of Vāsavadattā. The practical consequence of such a conclusion—if it is accepted as valid—is important, for the delicate demeanor is characterized by plenty of mu-

sic, song, and dance. The two acts in question are from the literary point of view evidently less elaborate than the other acts. The absence of stanzas, the brevity of these acts, and the sketchy character of the dialogue prove that they were substantially elaborated in actual theatrical production with music, song, and dance.

The introductory scene (*praveśaka*) to Act IV can be called a humorous alter ego of the third, or womb, span. The jester finds himself in a situation similar to that of Udayana. Having united in a happy "marriage" with comfort, he is missing his first and foremost beloved, that is, untroubled digestion. Act IV proper begins in the garden with the apparently meaningless conversation regarding flowers. But in its course comes the confession of love on the part of both ladies. This *revelation* of their feelings harmoniously accords with a similar scene which takes place between King Udayana and his jester, Vasantaka. But before that, their entrance abruptly interrupts the conversation of the ladies with a note of *exaggeration* that is characteristic of this span of action when hopes are high but danger is still in view. The "sixth arrow of love," of which Udayana rhapsodizes, symbolizes well the king's state of mind. And the background to Udayana's exaggerated words, furnished by Vasantaka's description of the locale, still further enhances their note of longing. The sequence of events which follows appears to consist of two similar waves, each built of an element of *inference* and of *outwitting*. Twice the king infers the proximity of Padmāvatī from various traces. But, while the first time the ladies, acting upon the advice of the maidservant, give the king and his jester the slip, thus outwitting them, the second time it is Vāsavadattā who outwits the inquisitive maid who asks the reason for her tears.

As has already been indicated, during the conversation of the king and the jester a *revelation* of what both of them really feel about the ladies comes about. Both these moments of *revelation* are crucial to this span of the plot, for it is then that Udayana and Vāsavadattā declare their partial satisfaction, marred by the continuing separation. The jester's humorous confession which terminates this element provokes not so much an *angry speech* as a heartrending one when he once again drives home the sad truth of Vāsavadattā's death. His words also terminate a situation which has continued since the entrance of the king early in the act. That situation was the *chance* of a meeting between Vāsavadattā and

Udayana. Although Udayana does not participate in the meeting consciously—as Vāsavadattā does—yet he somehow subconsciously yields to the atmosphere. His spontaneous reaction to the jester's confession, "All this I shall tell the queen Vāsavadattā!" marks the highest pitch of this span. The span ends in what seems to be a delicate attempt at *outwitting* Padmāvatī who has witnessed unobserved the entire conversation and now can well appreciate the courteous behavior of both the jester and his master.

The structure of the fourth, or reflection, span of the plot, which corresponds to Act V, is an obvious repetition of the womb span, though the elements used for the actual construction of this span are different. Both the hero and the heroine are brought near each other in an even more striking way than previously, so much so that they rest upon the same couch. The king dreams, and in dreaming talks to Vāsavadattā. Then comes his awakening and the jester rejects his vision with cruel words. The degree of intensity of this situation makes out of what could have been a hope phase, a phase of frustration. The same intensity is responsible for the choice of the *distress* element as a leitmotif of the reflection span. It is once again anticipated in an introductory scene. Padmāvatī's headache is symbolic of her unhappiness, which has also become Udayana's. The *distress* which has overcome him is expressed in the very first stanza that he recites. It rises to its highest in the fifth stanza and continues through Udayana's awakening, when it changes into an element of *denial*, the executor of which is—as mentioned before—the jester. Gaining in intensity, this element becomes an element of *blockade* when the jester calls the whole mental preoccupation of the king with what he believes was a dream, vanity (*anartha*). Then the chamberlain of the king enters and the germ-oriented action is effectively *grasped* again when he announces the readiness of the entire army to meet the enemy Arupi in final battle. The *optimistic* note transpiring from the spirited words of the king bracing himself for the fight ends the fourth span of the plot and, at the same time, Act V of the play.

One of the most interesting aspects of this span is an element of *grasping* which brings to the surface—if only for a while—the political undercurrent of the play to which the fate of Vāsavadattā is so closely linked. The success of Yaugandharāyana's political strategy means, after all, her reunion with her husband. The element of *distress* is rather long here. It is good therefore, that this element



is interspersed with the elements of the previous span as though in continuation of that span. This will be, for example, *panic* at the sight of an imaginary serpent and an *inference* regarding Padmāvati's supposed presence in the lake-bower (Act V, v. 29). We need to note also that twice the king addresses the jester with words of contempt—although it can hardly be considered *dazzling* contempt—and in stanzas 30 and 31 he *narrates* past experiences.

The supporting scene (*viṣkambhaka*) between Acts V and VI recalls the spirit of *distress* so characteristic of the preceding, fourth span. When envoys of Queen Aṅgāravati, the mother of Vāsavadattā, enter, the situation anticipates the most important aspect of the last span, that is, an element of *mystery*. Act VI opens with the entrance of Udayana and a *reprimand* addressed to the ungrateful lute (*vīṇā*) of Vāsavadattā. This reproachful spirit evolves, in the next stanza, into a *narration* of past experiences. Now this element comes up many times right down to stanza 51. It can be heard in stanzas 42, 43, and 46, and is picked up also in the prose passage in which the nurse of Vāsavadattā relates her mother's message. Finally, it arises from the sad words of the hero as he contemplates the picture of his dead wife. Important as the *narration* element is, it is not the sole master of the moment. The entrance of the envoys *spans* the events of this fifth span and those of the first. It also constitutes an *awakening* with regard to those aspects of action which, after the lapse of the first span, have been more or less dropped. An admixture of the *reprimand* element reverberates in the words of the king when he wonders what reaction her father Mahāsena (Act VI, v. 42) might have to the news of Vāsavadattā's demise. It also can be felt in the pronouncement of the chamberlain of Mahāsena which is virtually a tirade against fate. This is an extremely interesting speech, for it is the only instance in which a character voices the doubt which is at the back of everybody's mind: Is it right to play so ruthlessly with human beings and their feelings just for political ends? The chamberlain does not blame wicked politicians nor does he revolt against fate. But the doubt is there though the chamberlain, in a true Indian way, tends to consider the entire problem unavoidable, betraying his attitude in the optative mood he employs.

The next element which is, as it were, superimposed upon the *narration* element is that of *delight*, which is expressed in the words of the king as he inquires with great reverence about the

well-being of his erstwhile "in-laws" (Act VI, vv. 44, 47), and also in those of the chamberlain addressed to the king (vv. 45, 48). When the king acknowledges the message of Queen Aṅgāravatī the element of *delight* changes into one of *oration*, bringing in the spirit of conciliation and generosity. Now, the main motif of the last span sets in, the element of *mystery*. It begins when Vāsavadattā's portrait, brought by the envoys from Ujjayinī, is unveiled, and lasts until the ascetic is revealed to be Yaugandharāyaṇa himself. It can truly be called an element of *mystery*, for, along with the true identity of the so-called Āvantikā (Vāsavadattā), it reveals the fact that she has never been formally betrothed to Udayana and means that their love has never been brought into the sphere of virtue. It is meaningful that the fact of the performance of the required nuptial rites on the painted proxies of the bride and bridegroom is—through these very substitutes, that is, portraits—connected with the final act of amelioration in Vāsavadattā's fate. For only after the sacramental ceremony had been performed was it possible to recognize in the heroine the wife par excellence of the king. Otherwise she was just Āvantikā. It also sheds light on the attitudes of all concerned, which at first seem so unacceptable. For the pure love relationship, when deprived of the sanctity of virtue, has to give way to the demands of welfare of the empire. While this element lasts, the element called a *span* again appears when the germinal matter of the first, or forehead, span is picked up by the announcement of the arrival of Yaugandharāyaṇa in the garb of an ascetic.

In the *retrospect* that follows, Yaugandharāyaṇa wonders what will possibly be the reaction of the king (v. 43), and it is exactly this reaction which makes him answer in the form of the *oration* (v. 54). Now with great *joy* the king discovers the true identity of the ascetic and of Vāsavadattā. The final *deliverance* from all miseries comes, Vāsavadattā's *oration* addressed to Padmāvatī follows, and then comes a *reprimand* in which the king speaks about the minister Rumaṇvāt. An element of *termination* is apparently missing from the play and the final laudation (*praśasti*) follows directly.

There are now two questions to be answered. Is the analysis of the span-elements of value in making a critical evaluation of a Sanskrit play? And does this analysis offer the actor a practical method for preparation of an actual presentation of a Sanskrit play? Both questions can be answered in the affirmative.

The span theory presents an ideal image of action as conceived in Indian thought. The way it has been considered by the playwrights will betray either creativity or mere slavishness. Here I shall risk the general opinion that Bhāsa does not treat the span theory, especially in its detail of the sixty-four span-elements, very rigidly. The smooth flow of his language and the miniaturistic quality of the scenes, which are rather well-knit, combine to make this drama most attractive material for performance. Yet his disregard for some of the span-elements cannot always be counted to his advantage. The omission of such elements as resistance, the argument, the joke, the splendid joke, the thunderbolt, and predicament, deprives the play of much possible dramatic tension. Also, the fact that some elements are treated more or less formally and are only insignificantly related to the germinal matter—as for instance the dissension of the forehead span, the announcement of the head span and the dazzlement of the reflection span—does not contribute positively to the play. The omission of the termination element of the last span, at least in its full-fledged form, is responsible for the rather abrupt way in which the play ends. In this respect it has to be noted that Bhāsa does not skillfully resolve the element of mystery. The trivial, “Go inside, queen, together with Padmāvati” is not sufficiently balanced by the following orations. Consequently, the play leaves the impression that someone has tampered with it; this is the only way to absolve Bhāsa of its shortcomings. I must say that the absence of the termination element, the problem of missing verses,<sup>21</sup> and the abruptness with which some of the motifs of the play end indicates this possibility quite strongly. Supporting this idea is the fact that we know positively that the South Indian actors (*cākyārs*) who have preserved this text do not perform with exaggerated fidelity the dramas they have in their repertory.

Summing up, I have to say that by eliminating totally the political undercurrent from the three inner spans of the play—it is brought back in what strikes us as a sudden and artificial way by the end of the reflection span—Bhāsa has shorn it of a great deal of its dramatic appeal. What I mean can be well exemplified by comparing this play with *The Little Clay Cart* (*Mṛcchakaṭika*), where the political motif lends thrill and excitement to the story of Vasantasenā's and Cārudatta's love. All this granted, we still should remember that the elimination of the political undercurrent was most probably quite consciously intended by Bhāsa. *The Vision of*

*Vasavadattā* and *The Vow of Yaugandharāyaṇa* (*Pratijñāyugandharāyaṇa*) preceding it should be treated as twin plays as far as their "ideological" import is concerned. The three aims of human existence (*trivarga*) are here the basic criteria. The first of the two plays is love-based and welfare-oriented (*kāmaśrita* and *arthapradhāna*), the second just the other way round. In the first, the political aim of restoration of the Kauśāmbian empire is achieved by means of the love of *Vasavadattā* and *Padmāvatī*. In the second, it is the fulfillment of love which is achieved by means of political scheming. And while, practically speaking, politicians are absent in the first play, in the second the lovers are in the background. Thus some of the dramatic tension lacking in *The Vision of Vasavadattā* we shall find in *The Vow of Yaugandharāyaṇa*.

By now it should be fairly clear that the span analysis of a drama can be of great help to an actor who tries to understand it properly. But the importance of this analysis does not end here. It also facilitates the determination of the actor's interpretation of the text in accordance with its emotional content.

Before I try to elucidate this point I would like to draw attention to the fact that the actor's interpretation of his role in classical Indian theater was and is highly conventionalized. There is one aspect of the *rasa* theory which has been persistently overlooked or taken for granted; that is, the very practical way that *rasa* is actually generated. Of course we have been paying a lot of lip service to the concept of determinants (*vibhāva*), consequents (*anubhāva*), inherent (*sthāyin*), transitory (*vyabhicārin*) and inborn (*sāttvika*) emotional dispositions (*bhāva*).<sup>22</sup> But so far as I am aware there has been no attempt to see how they are distributed, and what their sequence and pattern is in a play. This is of capital importance for the actor, for we should remember that consequents are nothing more and nothing less than the elements of acting themselves.

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* says that span-elements should be inserted into a play keeping in view both *rasa* and dispositions, together with determinants and consequents.<sup>23</sup> This resolves our basic problem. To determine the span-element structure means also to determine the emotional pattern of a play and in consequence the actor's conventional interpretation of it.

Now, many of the span-elements indicate directly the character of relevant determinants and the remaining make it much simpler

to define them, as we can see in a concrete example. Since such an analysis of the entire play would be too bulky I propose to apply it only to one act of *The Vision of Vāsavadattā*. The *cakṛyās* of Kerala to this day stage Act V only, which they call *Svapnāṅka*. Let us see what the pattern of this act is from the point of view of its emotional content as well as of the character of the actor's interpretation of it. The sequence of span-elements of this act is: *distress*, *denial*, *blockade*, *grasping*, and *optimism*. The principal source of the content of the three first elements is the (supposed) death of the loved one. This most obviously is a determinant of the inherent emotional disposition of sorrow. The review of this part of Act V, understood as an aggregate of determinants, also makes the following transitory emotional dispositions relevant to it: discouragement (*nīrveda*), depression (*viṣāda*), yearning (*autsukya*), sleeping (*nidrā*), dreaming (*supta*), awakening (*vibodha*), insanity (*unmāda*), and deliberation (*vitarka*). The sum total of the consequents of these dispositions, as well as of the relevant inborn dispositions, will constitute, together with the detailed interpretation of the text through the *mudrā*, the actor's interpretation of these three elements. As an example, let me give here a few of the consequents which the *Nāṭyaśāstra* lists along with the dispositions mentioned above: shedding tears, looseness of limbs, deep breathing, giving up cleansing of the body, nodding the head, looking down, raising the eyebrows, looking with steadfast gaze, rolling the eyes, yawning, massaging of the body, and so on.

The absence of sadness, power, and heroism are the obvious determinants of the two following elements, *grasping* and *optimism*. It is therefore an inherent emotional disposition of energy which will characterize them. Apart from that, the following transitory emotional dispositions seem to be relevant here: envy (*asūyā*), distraction (*moha*), contentment (*dhṛti*), joy (*harṣa*), agitation (*āvega*), arrogance (*grāva*), indignation (*amarṣa*), and cruelty (*ugrātā*). Some of the consequents to express them will be: finding fault with others, knitting the eyebrows, excessive movement, enjoyment of objects gained, brightness of the face, getting up, taking up of weapons, contempt for others, harsh words, shaking the head, looking for ways and means, killing, rebuking, and so on.

The fact that the element of *distress* is interspersed with other elements does not substantially alter the emotional pattern of Act V. The pathetic taste and the heroic are undoubtedly principal in

this portion of the play. Faint reverberations of the taste of love, mirth, and fear could also be traced by applying the same method. But they are clearly subservient to the two mentioned above.

The analysis just presented is an attempt to describe what in part is a spontaneous and, to a degree, a subconscious process. Thus the utility of it could be questioned were it not for the fact that we find ourselves confronted with a distant and profoundly different culture. Consequently, it would be somewhat too risky to rely solely on our own intuition in the interpretation of its dramatic literature.

So far as I am aware this is one of the first and few attempts to apply these criteria consistently in an analysis of Sanskrit drama.<sup>24</sup> Since neither the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, nor Abhinavagupta are always univocal in the definitions of span-elements, my understanding of them should indeed be treated as a proposition open to criticism. I am sure that it will require a long discussion to determine an exact shape for the criteria I have been talking about in these pages. In this respect the first thing to do is to consider the entire body of later literature on span-elements which I have purposefully disregarded, feeling that—first and foremost—the earliest form of this theory has to be investigated without any detraction that might be caused by what could be a later misinterpretation of it. Besides, further application of this theory in a critical examination of other dramas, especially from the viewpoint of a performance, will also clarify many an obscure point, as indeed has happened in the present case.

## Notes

1. S. Windakiewicz, *Teatr kolegiów jezuitckich w dawnej Polsce*. [The theater of the Jesuit colleges in early Poland] (Kraków, 1922). Thanks to V. Raghavan, I am in possession of a paper by G. Artola entitled, "The earliest plays about India," *Sanskrita Ranga Annual* (Madras) 4 (1965), pp. 1-19, which contains much detailed information on the topic.
2. Wojciech Bogusławski (1757-1829), known as the father of the Polish national theater, writes about this in the introduction to his Polish version of *The Indian Widow* (Dziela, *Collected Works* [Warszawa, 1830], vol. 10).
3. *Dialog*, no. 8 (1969). (A monthly published in Warsaw.) "Grotowski a tradycja indyjska" [Grotowski and the Indian tradition], pp. 86-91. Also available in English in *Sangeet Natak Akademi Journal* (New Delhi), 1970.

4. Bharatamuni, *Nāṭyaśāstra* 2nd. ed., vol. 1, Gaekwad Oriental Series 36 (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1956), p. 42 (1.119).  
*yo yam svabhāvo lokasya sukhaduḥkhasamanvītaḥ/  
so ngābhīnayopeto nāṭyam ity abhidhīyate//*
5. M. C. Byrski, *Concept of Ancient Indian Theatre* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1974), p. 102.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 104–112.
7. *Nāṭyaśāstra*, 1st ed., vol. 3 Gaekwad Oriental Series 124 (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1954), pp. 8–9 (19.14).  
*sarvasyaiva hi kāryasya prārabdhasya phalārthibhiḥ/  
etās tv anukrameṇaiva pañcāvasthā bhavanti hi//*
8. Byrski, *Ancient Indian Theatre*, p. 133.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 135.
10. *R̥gveda* 10.129.
11. *Nāṭyaśāstra*, vol. 1, p. 237 (5.108).
12. S. Lévi, *La Doctrine du Sacrifice dans les Brahmanas* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1898), p. 10.
13. S. N. Dasgupta and S. K. De, *A History of Sanskrit Literature* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1962), p. lxxxi.
14. M. C. Byrski "Can Sanskrit Drama Tell Us Anything More?" *Educational Theatre Journal* 27, no. 4 (December 1975), pp. 445–452.
15. Not only in the case of *vilāsa*, but also in some other cases, I differ in my rendering of terms into English from what M. M. Ghosh suggests in his translation of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The differences result, of course, from my reinterpretation of the definitions of those *sandhyāṅga* (span elements). *Vilāsa*, for example, rendered "amorousness" would unnecessarily be limited to erotic plays.
16. *Nāṭyaśāstra*, vol. 3, p. 47.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 11 (19.18);  
*ekalope caturthasya dvilope triciturthayoḥ/  
dvitīyatricaturthānām trilope lopa īsyate//*  
p. 30 (19.47).  
*mukhanirvahāṇe tatra kartavyaḥ kavibhiḥ sadā//*
18. *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Kāvya-mālā Series No. 42 (Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1943), p. 294 (18.94).  
*sarveṣāṃ kāvyānāṃ nānārasabhāvayuktiyuktānām/  
nirvahāṇe kartavyo nityaḥ hi raso dbhūtas tajjñaiḥ//*
19. To my mind, *prastāvi* should not be considered a *sandhyāṅga*. The Gaekwad Oriental Series edition of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* gives to it the same number as to *kāvyasamhāra* (vol. 3, p. 31; 19.104). See also V. M. Kulkarni's article in the *Journal of the Oriental Institute* (University of Baroda) 5, no. 4 (June 1956):398.
20. *Śrīvatsyāyanamahāriṣiprañtāḥ Kāmasūtram* (Bombay) samvat 1991 (śak. 1856), vol. 1, p. 46 (1.2.15): *arthaś ca rājñāḥ (gatyān)*.
21. It is in Act IV that a strophā quoted in the *Nāṭyadarpaṇa* of Rāmacandra and Guṇacandra, Gaekwad Oriental Series 48 (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1959), p. 74, may be fitted:  
*pādākṛāntāni puṣpāni soṣma cedam śilātalam/  
nūnāṃ kācid īhāśnā māṃ dṛṣtvā sahasā gatā//*  
This exactly has been done by M. R. Kale in his edition of the play (Bombay: Bookseller's Publishing Co., 1961), pp. 16, 84.
22. In my book, *Concept of Ancient Indian Theatre*, I presented my view of the

interrelationship between *itiṛtta* and *rasa*. What I am presenting now is an improvement upon that theory. In particular, my view of the *sthāyibhāva* and of the exact relationship between the *sandhyāṅga* and the *vibhāva* has changed. For a comparison, see pp. 147 ff. of my book.

23. *Nāṭyaśāstra*, vol. 3, p. 61 (19.104-105).

*yathāsandhi tu kartavyāny etāny aṅgāni nāṭake/  
kavibhiḥ kāvyakuśalai rasabhāvamapekṣya tu//*

24. Here an interesting study by T. C. Mainkar, *The Theory of the Samdhis and the Samdhyāṅgas* (Poona: n.p., 1960), can be mentioned. Although the author does not apply the theory to Sanskrit drama, he makes an interesting attempt to see its usefulness in the European context. Apart from that an article by V. M. Kulkarni entitled, "The conception of the *sandhis* in the Sanskrit drama," *Journal of the Oriental Institute* 5, no. 4 (June 1956):369-402, should be mentioned although there is no attempt in it to test the theory in practice. I do not list here the ancient Indian commentators who did use this theory as one of their basic criteria.



# *The Vision of Vāsavadattā*

## by Bhāsa

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\* An acting version by Paul Cravath

### DRAMATIS PERSONAE

(In order of appearance)

STAGE MANAGER

FLAG BEARER

BEARER OF THE GOLDEN PITCHER

TWO GUARDS of Magadha in the retinue of Princess Padmāvati  
YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA, chief minister of Udayana, king of Kauśāmbi  
VĀSAVADATTĀ, daughter of King Mahāsena of Ujjayinī, and the  
queen of Udayana

CHAMBERLAIN of Magadha

COMPANION to Padmāvati

PADMĀVATĪ, princess of Magadha, sister of King Darśaka

FEMALE ASCETIC

STUDENT

NURSE of Padmāvati

MAID to Padmāvati

PADMINIKĀ, companion to Padmāvati

VASANTAKA, a jester, companion to Udayana

UDAYANA, king of Kauśāmbi

MADHUKĀRIKĀ, companion to Padmāvati

VIJAYĀ, female bodyguard

CHAMBERLAIN of Ujjayinī

NURSE of Vāsavadattā

## PROLOGUE

STAGE MANAGER.

(Verse 1: *Ārya*)

The arms of Baladeva glimmer like the rising moon,  
They give you the strength that a cup of wine may give you,  
They show you the glowing of the lotus, Padmavaternapurnao,

And the quickening of spring,  
So, may the arms of Baladeva protect you all.

My friends, we are going to perform a play attributed to a man who lived over 2,000 years ago in ancient India, hoping to evoke what is known in India as *rasa*—a joyful consciousness. We hope that as you experience the adventures of Udayana, king of Kauśāmbī, and Vāsavadattā, his queen, you too will know that illusion and reality are one and the same. The king loved music more than politics, and because of this he lost his kingdom to his rival Āruṇi. Now his worried prime minister tried to persuade the king to make a political alliance by marrying again with the Princess Padmāvatī of Magadha, but the king refused to hear of this. He was deeply in love with Vāsavadattā with whom he had eloped in the first place. However, Vāsavadattā, realizing that the king's honor and duty were at stake, agreed to fall in with the prime minister's scheme to trick the king into believing that she had been burned alive—accidentally—in a palace fire while the king was away hunting. As our play opens Vāsavadattā and the prime minister, disguised as brother and sister, are approaching a holy place in a forest. . . .

OFFSTAGE VOICES. Out of the way, out of the way, everyone! Out of the way, out of the way!

STAGE MANAGER. It sounds as though the actors are impatient to begin, and I must change my costume for my appearance in the first act.

(Verse 2: *Anuṣṭubh*)

The guards of King Darśaka of Magadha, accompanying his youngest sister the Princess Padmāvatī are rudely driving

everyone away showing no respect for the holiness of this forest ashram. [Exit.]

## ACT ONE

TWO GUARDS. [Entering.] Clear the path, everyone. Out of the way.

[Enter YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA disguised as a sādhu and VĀSAVADATTĀ disguised as Āvantikā, a lady of Ujjayinī.]

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. [Listening.] Why is it that they are being pushed aside?

(Verse 3: Śārdūlavikṛtita)

The people of this peaceful grove have left behind the city  
and its ways

To seek tranquility within this life apart.

Who would have the proud pretension to treat them as the  
hagglers on a village street

And profane this place with their commands and loud abra-  
sive din?

VĀSAVADATTĀ. Who is it that turns us away in this manner?

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. Apparently, some who have themselves  
turned away from the right path.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. Will I be pushed aside as well?

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. Princess, even the gods when in disguise are  
not respected.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. This insult causes me more pain than the fatigue of  
all our long journey.

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. You have yourself enjoyed the power of roy-  
alty and for the moment feel weakness at its loss. But have no  
fear; that power will be yours again.

(Verse 4: Vasantatīlakā)

The wishes of your heart were once a King's command,  
And when he is victorious you shall again enjoy that state.  
Remember well that the fortunes of this world are but the  
spokes of a wheel

Which only time which only time can make revolve.

TWO GUARDS. All right, step back now! Clear the way!

[*The CHAMBERLAIN OF MAGADHA enters.*]

CHAMBERLAIN OF MAGADHA. No, no, no! Wait a moment! *Sam-bhaṣaka!* You must not turn these people away. Look at them.

(Verse 5: *Puṣpitāgrā*)

Do not betray the reputation of our king  
By dealing so harshly with the people of this place.  
The ashram is their home, a retreat,  
A place of meditation in the jungle of this world.

TWO GUARDS. As you wish, sire. [*Exit.*]

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. Aha! This man seems more civil than the rest. Come, let us approach him.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. As you wish.

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. [*Approaching CHAMBERLAIN.*] Your honor, may I ask you why the ashram's people are being treated in this manner?

CHAMBERLAIN OF MAGADHA. Ah, worthy ascetic!

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. [*Aside.*] Well, this man is respectful, though I feel uneasy at being addressed as "ascetic."

CHAMBERLAIN OF MAGADHA. Let me explain to you the circumstances. The Princess Padmāvati, sister of our great King Darśaka, is just returning from a visit with the Queen Mother Mahādevī and with her permission is returning to Rājagṛha. The princess intends to spend the night here, but . . .

(Verse 6: *Vasantatilakā*)

You holy one, may fetch from the treasures of this forest,  
Flowers, water sacred kusha grass and kindling;  
Her family's custom is to honor piety; it is to honor piety.  
And yours will feel no interruption at her hand.

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. [*Aside.*] So! This is Padmāvati, the princess of Magadha whom our astrologers say is to become the consort of my king. Mmmm.

(Verse 7: *Anuṣṭubh*)

The same thing can attract or repel, depending on the state of one's mind. My mind which now anticipates success feels deep respect where anger dwelt only moments past.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. [*Aside.*] Hearing that she is a princess, I feel toward her a sisterly affection, as though we shared a common bond.

[*Enter PADMĀVATĪ, a MAID and others.*]

COMPANION. Princess, this way. Here is the entrance to the ashram.

[*A FEMALE ASCETIC is discovered, seated.*]

FEMALE ASCETIC. Princess, you are most welcome.

PADMĀVATĪ. I am extremely grateful to you.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. [*Aside.*] She is indeed a princess. Her innocent beauty reflects a noble birth.

FEMALE ASCETIC. May your life be long, my child. And may you treat our ashram as your home.

PADMĀVATĪ. Your gentleness assures my comfort.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. [*Aside.*] Her face is beautiful, her speech is sweet and one may not mistake her graciousness.

FEMALE ASCETIC. [*To the MAID.*] Tell me, is there no one who seeks to wed this princess?

COMPANION. Of course there is. King Mahāsenā of Ujjayinī has sent ambassadors on his son's behalf.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. [*Aside.*] My father! [*Still aside.*] So, you are to be as one of our own family, then.

FEMALE ASCETIC. I am happy to hear it. I have heard tell they are both families of great stature. Their union deserves such loveliness.

PADMĀVATĪ. Sir, there may be someone in this ashram who will do us the honor of accepting our gifts. Please ask them if there are favors of any sort we might bestow.

CHAMBERLAIN OF MAGADHA. As you wish, Princess. Holy people of this forest ashram, the Princess Padmāvati of Magadha wishes you to know that for your welcome she is most grateful. And, as her religious duty, humbly seeking the favor of your prayers, she begs you to accept her gifts in gratitude.

(Verse 8: *Śārdūlavikṛtita*)

Is there one who needs a begging bowl or saffron robe?  
A disciple wishing to give a token to his old teacher?  
As a friend of piety, a favor to herself, she bids you speak.  
O holy ones, what shall be given today, and to whom?

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. [*Aside.*] How splendid! [*Aloud.*] Your honor, I have a request.

PADMĀVATĪ. Happily my visit shall not be in vain.

FEMALE ASCETIC. Who is that? Everyone here is quite contented. He must be a stranger.

CHAMBERLAIN OF MAGADHA. Yes, what is it you wish?

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. This is my sister Āvantikā, a lady of Ujjayinī. Her husband has gone abroad. My wish is that the Princess Padmāvati would agree to be her protector for some time. You see,

(Verse 9: *Vaiśvadevī*)

I do not wear this *sadhu's* robe for profit:  
It will bring her only poverty and pain.  
The wisdom and the sense of duty of this princess  
Could protect her virtue and mark my deepest gain.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. [*Aside.*] The noble Yaugandharāyaṇa wishes to leave me here. Ah, well . . . I am sure his reasons are sound.

CHAMBERLAIN OF MAGADHA. Princess, this man's request is great indeed. How can we possibly consent?

(Verse 10: *Anuṣṭubh*)

Wealth or penance or even life, these are possible to give.  
But of greater difficulty is the guarding of a pledge.

PADMĀVATĪ. Sir, after first making our proclamation announcing that we will bestow any favor, it is not right to hesitate. Whatever he asks shall be done.

CHAMBERLAIN OF MAGADHA. You are quite right, Princess. Such words speak well of you.

COMPANION. That you keep your word brings all of us great joy.

FEMALE ASCETIC. May you live long, my child.

CHAMBERLAIN OF MAGADHA. Holy one, the princess agrees to be the guardian of your sister.

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. I am most grateful to her. My child, it is my wish that for the time being you remain with this princess.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. [*Aside.*] I shall do as he says. There is nothing else I can do. I feel so helpless.

PADMĀVATĪ. Be at peace. Please rest assured. You are to be as one of our own family.

FEMALE ASCETIC. To judge from her looks, she seems like a princess herself!

COMPANION. It looks to me as though she once enjoyed better days than these.

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. How splendid! Half my task is finished—and exactly as we planned it. When King Udayana regains the throne of Kauśāmbī, and Vāsavadattā his queen is restored to him, Padmāvatī will certainly stand as witness that I did not fail as the protector of Vāsavadattā because,

(Verse 11: *Vasantatilakā*)

The men of prophecy who first foretold these troubles

Said this Padmāvatī would also wed our king.

With faith in prophecy and trust in fate, faith in prophecy  
and trust in fate,

I now engage, I now engage in these affairs.

[*Enter a young STUDENT.*]

STUDENT. [*Looking upward.*] The sun is at its peak, and I'm exhausted. I think I'll take a rest, but where? This place seems to be near an ashram.

(Verse 12: *Śardūlavikrīḍita*)

Such fat brown cows that browse beside the gentle, fearless  
deer.

Such flower-crested trees with heavy, carefully tended fruit.  
 Such soil that never felt the plow of man; such soil that never  
 felt the plow of man,  
 But man is here, man is here for wisps of smoke suggest an altar near.

I think I'll walk in. [*Sees CHAMBERLAIN.*] But, just a moment. That person doesn't belong here. [*Looks in another direction.*] But there *are* holy men, too. I think it will be all right to join them. What! There are ladies here!

CHAMBERLAIN OF MAGADHA. Please, come in.

[*VĀSAVADATTĀ makes a sound, turns aside and veils her face.*]

PADMĀVATĪ. [*Aside.*] She is so modest. I see I must restrict myself if I am to care for her.

CHAMBERLAIN OF MAGADHA. [*Offering water.*] Be perfectly at ease. The ashram is for everyone. Since we arrived before you, permit us to be your host.

STUDENT. Thank you. [*They offer fruit and water.*] Through your kindness my fatigue is gone.

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. Now, may I ask. . . . Where are you going? Or for that matter, from where are you coming? Where is your home?

STUDENT. I am from Rājagṛha the capital of Magadha. I am a student of the vedic scriptures and have been studying at Lāvāṇaka, a village near Kauśāmbī.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. [*Aside.*] Ah! Lāvāṇaka! The sound of that name brings such sadness to my heart.

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. And you have completed your studies?

STUDENT. No, not yet.

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. But if you have not finished your studies there, how is it that you have returned here?

STUDENT. It's a sad, sad story. There was in that place a terrible catastrophe.

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. Indeed? What happened?



STUDENT. You see, there is a king there named Udayana.

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. Ah! Yes? I have heard he is a great man. . . .  
And what happened?

STUDENT. After his enemy Āruṇi captured Kauśāmbī, King Udayana came to live in Lāvāṇaka with his entire court. This King Udayana was deeply, passionately in love with his wife whose name was Vāsavadattā. She was the daughter of the king of Ujjayinī.

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. I do believe you. But . . . what happened?

STUDENT. Well, one day when the king was out hunting, the village caught fire and his wife burned alive in the flames.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. [*Aside.*] That's not true. I am deathly, deathly sad, but quite alive.

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. And then? What happened then?

STUDENT. They say the chief minister of the king named Yaugandharāyaṇa jumped into the flames to save her, but he perished as well. When the king returned and heard the news he went nearly mad with grief, and only the strength of his ministers prevented him from jumping in the same fire to end his life.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. [*Aside.*] My poor husband. Oh, how difficult it must be for him to be alone.

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. Yes, then? What then?

STUDENT. The king snatched up the half-burned ornaments that had adorned the body of his wife, clutched them to his breast and fell upon the ground unconscious.

ALL. Oh, no! How awful!

VĀSAVADATTĀ. [*Aside.*] Please . . . please ask him no more.

COMPANION. Princess, do you see? The lady weeps.

PADMĀVATĪ. How extremely sensitive she must be.

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. To be sure. Quite so. My sister is by nature tenderhearted. Now, go on. What happened then?

STUDENT. The king slowly regained his consciousness.

PADMĀVATĪ. [*Aside.*] Thank God, he lives. My heart for one moment sank in fear.

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. I am happy to hear it. Then, what happened?

STUDENT. Then the king got up, his body covered with the red dust from the ground, and began to moan over and over, "Oh, Vāsavadattā, my queen! My beloved wife!"

(Verse 13: *Śalinī*)

His grief was greater than the bird, in the legend,  
Which mourns to death on separation from its mate.  
As an image she remains within his heart.  
She cannot die and fire cannot cool her husband's love.

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. And did no one seek to comfort their king?

STUDENT. Oh, yes, yes. There is one minister named Rumaṇvat who did his best at consoling King Udayana.

(Verse 14: *Śikharinī*)

Like the king, he does not eat at all or bathe his face except  
with tears.  
And if the king were to leave this life, his minister too would  
surely die.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. Happily my lord is in good hands.

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. [*Aside.*] Ah, Rumaṇvat. What a heavy responsibility you bear.

(Verse 15: *Anuṣṭubh*)

My burden has lessened while his can only grow,  
And as the king depends on him, so do we all.

Tell me, how is the king at present?

STUDENT. That I do not know. The ministers, with great difficulty, departed from the village taking the king, who each day lamented, "Here we often sat and talked. Here, from me, she learned the lute. Once we slept together here. Here we had a quarrel." And so he spoke. With the departure of the king, the village had the empty desolation of that morning moment when in the sky the moon and all the stars have set. So then, I too, came away.



12. *The Vision of Vāsavadattā*, Act I. Asian Theatre Program, University Theatre, University of Hawaii, 1974. Directed by Shanta Gandhi; musical direction by M. Y. Kamashastri. Queen Vāsavadattā is stopped by the Guards of Yaugandharāyana, as Stage Manager, playing the Chamberlain, to King Udayana, watches. (Photo by Francis Haar.)



13. *The Vision of Vāsavadattā*, Prologue. Asian Theatre Program, University Theatre, University of Hawaii, 1974. Directed by Shanta Gandhi. As part of the invocation ritual of the prologue, the Stage Manager carries Indra's Flag Staff. The Flag Bearer and the Bearer of the Golden Pitcher raise their hands, praying for a successful performance. The scene is described in detail in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. (Photo by Francis Haar.)



14. *The Vision of Vāsavadattā*, Act II. Asian Theatre Program, University Theatre, University of Hawaii, 1974. Queen Vāsavadattā, Pad-
15. *The Vision of Vāsavadattā*, Act III. Asian Theatre Program, University Theatre, University of Hawaii, 1974. Directed by Shanta Gandhi. Madhukārikā and Padminikā, two maids, weave flower garlands with Queen Vāsavadattā using formal hand gestures (*hastā*) that are described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. An example of how, in Indian theater practice, a scene which is only alluded to in the play text may be expanded and developed through mime. (Photo by Francis Haar.)



māvatī, and Maids are described in the play text as "playing ball." The director, Shanta Gandhi, has created a short scene of mime in which the imaginary ball is bounced, tossed in the air, caught, passed from one woman to the next, dropped, rolled on the ground, and so forth, showing the innocent pleasure of young women when in each other's company. (Photo by Francis Haar.)

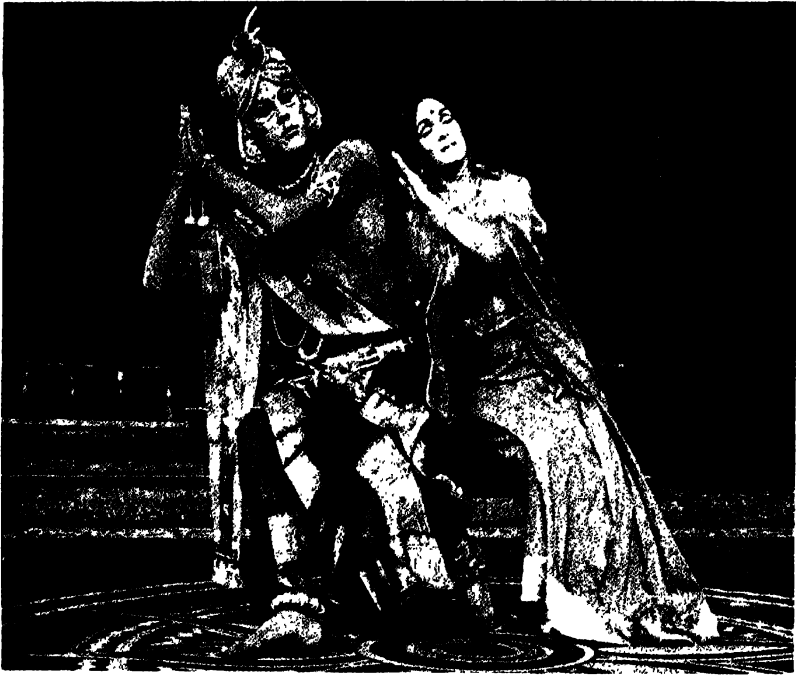




16. *The Vision of Vāsavadattā*, Act IV. Asian Theatre Program, University Theatre, University of Hawaii, 1974. Directed by Shanta Gandhi. Vasantaka, the jester, stung by a bee, stands in the central area of the open stage marked by sacred paintings. In keeping with ancient staging practices, *Vāsavadattā*, Padmāvatī, and two Maids are imagined to be peeking out, unseen, from a bower on one side of the garden, while the Jester and King Udayana are trying to hide in foliage in another part of the garden. The impression of the garden is created by gesture and by verbal description; scenic representation is considered unnecessary. (Photo by Francis Haar.)

17. *The Vision of Vāsavadattā*, Act V. Asian Theatre Program, University Theatre, University of Hawaii, 1974. Directed by Shanta Gandhi. King Udayana mimes pulling a bow string as he sings the verse, "Our arrows shall fall in waves that crash down upon his ranks." The Stage Manager, standing to the king's right, takes the role of the Chamberlain who has just announced that the enemy is attacking. This follows the practice, still common in regional theater, of the Stage Manager taking various roles. The Jester watches. Strongly decorative makeup, using bold colors and distinctive patterns, visually emphasizes the nature of each character. (Photo by Francis Haar.)





18. *The Vision of Vāḍavadattā*, Act V. Asian Theatre Program, University Theatre, University of Hawaii, 1974. Directed by Shanta Gandhi. The scene of the play's title, in which King Udayana, dreaming, tells Vāsavadattā of his love for her. If performed realistically this would be a difficult scene to stage. Here the couple merely sits on a bench, which is symbolic of their lying side by side on a bed set in a garden pavilion, and enacts the scene in graceful, extended mime. Although it is nighttime, no lighting changes are made. (Photo by Francis Haar.)

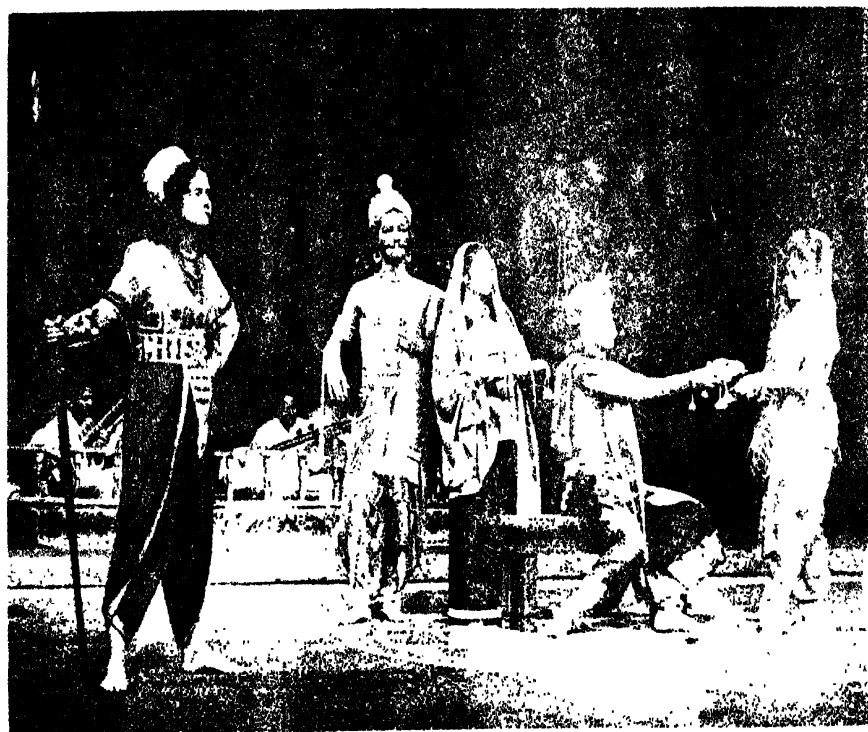


20. *The Vision of Vāsavadattā*, Act VI. Asian Theatre Program, University Theatre, University of Hawaii, 1974. Directed by Shanta Gandhi; musical direction by M. Y. Kamashastri. Queen Vāsavadattā is led into King Udayana's presence by Padmāvati. Yau-gandharāyaṇa, Chamberlain, Nurse, and Guard look on. Musicians seated at the rear, the pillars, the curtain and entrance-exits at the rear, and the non-specific, open stage space follow the description of the Sanskrit stage that is found in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The device of half concealing an entering character behind a hand-held curtain is taken from Indian regional theater forms. (Photo by Francis Haar.)



19. *The Vision of Vāsavadattā*, Act VI. King Udayana plays the *ṽṇā* and sings, remembering Vāsavadattā. The Jester looks on. The *ṽṇā* is intended to be seen as a stage prop, rather than as a real *ṽṇā*. Following descriptions in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of body colors appropriate to different characters, the king's body and face are colored light purple for royalty and the Brahman jester's body and face are light saffron. (Photo by Francis Haar.)





21. *The Vision of Vāsavadattā*, Act VI. Asian Theatre Program, University Theatre, University of Hawaii, 1974. Directed by Shanta Gandhi. King Udayana gives Vāsavadattā's portrait to Padmāvati, as the Nurse, Chamberlain, and Guard look on. Performing on an open stage which is unencumbered by scenery, each character takes on a special visual presence heightened by distinctive costume and makeup. Music, composed and directed by M. Y. Kamashastri, was played almost continuously throughout the performance to set the mood and to accompany the singing of verses in the text. (Photo by Francis Haar.)

FEMALE ASCETIC. Such praise from you who never saw him proves the noble virtue of this king.

COMPANION. Princess, do you think he would ever take another wife?

PADMĀVATĪ. [*Aside.*] My heart has already asked that question.

STUDENT. Please, I must be going. Allow me to take my leave.

CHAMBERLAIN AND YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. Yes, yes. Yes, of course, our blessings go with you.

STUDENT. Thank you. Thank you. [*Exit.*]

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. With the permission of the princess, I too will take my leave.

CHAMBERLAIN OF MAGADHA. Princess, it is the intention of this holy man also to depart.

PADMĀVATĪ. She will be lonely with her brother gone.

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. Such tender care as yours will soothe her loneliness I am sure. [*Prepares to leave.*] With your permission.

CHAMBERLAIN OF MAGADHA. Go then, and may we one day meet again.

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. You speak my wish. [*Exit.*]

CHAMBERLAIN OF MAGADHA. Princess, the time has come to go within.

PADMĀVATĪ. Holy woman, I salute you.

FEMALE ASCETIC. You have my blessing, May you be united with a husband equal to your worth.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. Mother, I bow to you.

FEMALE ASCETIC. And you, my child, may you soon be reunited with your worthy husband.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. Thank you. Thank you.

CHAMBERLAIN OF MAGADHA. This way then. Let us go. For now,

(Verse 16: *Śikhariṇī*)

The birds retire to their nests and in the pools the hermits bathe.

The evening ashram fires burn brightly 'neath their smoke.

The falling sun poises on the mountain in the West

And drawing in his rays, gently sinks to rest.

[*Exeunt.*]

## ACT TWO

*Palace grounds at Magadha.*

[*MAID enters.*]

MAID. [*Calling offstage.*] Kuñjarikā! Kuñjarikā! What has become of Princess Padmāvatī? Where is she? What? "Near the jasmine bower playing ball." Then that is where I'll go. [*Calls.*] Thank you. [*Walks about.*] Ah, here comes the princess now. Her earring pendants sway so gently with her movement. And see the tiny drops of beauty's moisture which heat has placed upon her brow. I will approach. [*Exit.*]

[*Enter PADMĀVATĪ, playing ball, accompanied by her retinue and VĀSAVADATTĀ.*]

VĀSAVADATTĀ. My dear, it is again your turn.

PADMĀVATĪ. No, thank you, dear sister. That is enough for today.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. Your hands are red from playing over long, almost as with the blush of love.

COMPANION. Do let us play, Princess. It is a joy of youthfulness and we are still so young. Not one of us has a husband.

PADMĀVATĪ. [*To VĀSAVADATTĀ.*] What do you mean? What are your thoughts that tease me with that smile?

VĀSAVADATTĀ. Forgive me. My simple thought is that your beauty has today a bridelike charm which draws admiring looks from every side.

PADMĀVATĪ. I should not have asked you to put your thoughts in words.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. The thought is always there but it shall be mute, if the future daughter-in-law of Mahāsena so desires.

PADMĀVATĪ. Mahāsena? And who, please tell me, is that?

VĀSAVADATTĀ. The king of Ujjayinī, famous for the vastness of his armies.

COMPANION. But my princess wishes to be wed to quite another man.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. And who might that be?

COMPANION. There is a king of Kauśāmbī, Udayana. With him the princess is in love.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. [*Aside.*] My husband? She loves him and hopes to be his wife? [*Aloud.*] I see. And why does she feel that way?

COMPANION. Because his heart is full of gentleness.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. There is no one knows that better than myself. It was that gentleness which first charmed me as well.

PADMINIKĀ. [*To PADMĀVATĪ.*] But, Princess, what if he is ugly?

VĀSAVADATTĀ. He is not ugly. He is handsome beyond description.

PADMĀVATĪ. Indeed? And how is it that you know?

VĀSAVADATTĀ. [*Aside.*] I must not be carried away by my attachment and forget my duty. What shall I say? Ah, yes. [*Aloud.*] I'm told that that is what the citizens of Ujjayinī say.

PADMĀVATĪ. Of course. They surely would have seen him, and beauty captivates the tongue as well as the mind.

[*Enter NURSE OF PADMĀVATĪ.*]

NURSE OF PADMĀVATĪ. Princess, my Princess, I bring you happy news. Your betrothal has been announced.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. To whom?

NURSE OF PADMĀVATĪ. To Udayana, the king of Kauśāmbī.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. And is he in good health, this . . . king?

NURSE OF PADMĀVATĪ. He seemed to me quite well when he arrived. He has agreed to wed my princess.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. What a sad loss.

NURSE OF PADMĀVATĪ. Not at all. What's the matter?

VĀSAVADATTĀ. I only meant that he has put aside his deepest sorrow and become indifferent to his loss.

NURSE OF PADMĀVATĪ. No, no, not indifferent. It's just that sadness does not unbalance men of greatness. Their hearts are governed by the Sacred Scriptures and they retain, in sorrow, a constant strength.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. Tell me, did he himself propose the marriage?

NURSE OF PADMĀVATĪ. Oh, no. He came here for another reason. But our king, observing his learning, beauty, nobility, and youth, offered him Padmāvati's hand.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. [*Aside.*] Then he is not to blame. Having now no wife he could not very well refuse.

[*Enter MAID.*]

MAID. Hurry, everyone, I beg you. The queen has just announced: "The conjunction of the stars is now auspicious, the royal marriage will take place this very day."

[*Exeunt.*]

VĀSAVADATTĀ. The speed with which events approach cannot exceed that of my heart's plunge into gloom.

NURSE OF PADMĀVATĪ. Come, Princess. Let us go at once.

## ACT THREE

### *Palace Garden*

[*Enter VĀSAVADATTĀ, deep in thought.*]

VĀSAVADATTĀ. I have come to this garden to be alone leaving Padmāvati surrounded by those mirthful women enjoying the

wedding festivities. I shall only softly break the silence of this garden but hope my tears are yet enough to purge the sorrow of my heart. But alas! He is mine no more and I am left with nothing. My noble husband belongs now to another [*She sits on a bench.*] And here I sit, alone. How fortunate is that little bird which, unable to bear the separation from its mate, dies. But I do not. I live. I mourn, but I live, and live on hope that I shall see my love once more.

[Enter PADMINIKĀ carrying flowers.]

PADMINIKĀ. Where is Āvantikā? [*Walks about.*] Ah, there she is sitting on a bench beneath the vines. How lovely. Her dress' only ornament is grace, and when she sits so far away in thought, she seems to be the moon obscured by mist. But, I must approach and interrupt. [*Moves to bench.*] Lady, I have been looking everywhere for you.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. And why?

PADMINIKĀ. The queen said, "Āvantikā is of a noble family; she is kind and skillful. She shall weave this wedding garland."

VĀSAVADATTĀ. And, for whom am I to weave it, may I ask?

PADMINIKĀ. For Padmāvatī, of course.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. [*Aside.*] That it should come to this! Fate has only cruelty for me.

PADMINIKĀ. Please excuse me, but there is no time for other thoughts. The bridegroom is already in his ceremonial bath, and the garland will be needed very soon.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. [*Aside.*] I can think of nothing else. But . . . [*To PADMINIKĀ.*] tell me, have you seen this bridegroom?

PADMINIKĀ. Oh, yes, I've seen him. I did it because of my affection for the princess. And . . . for my own curiosity.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. And how did he look?

PADMINIKĀ. There are no words to describe him.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. But, tell me, tell me, my dear, is he . . . handsome?

PADMINIKĀ. He looked to me just like . . . a godlike Kāmadeva, the god of love.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. Oh, that will do.

PADMINIKĀ. Why do you ask me to stop?

VĀSAVADATTĀ. You see . . . it is not proper to listen to the words that praise another woman's husband.

PADMINIKĀ. Is it possible, then, to hurry with the garland?

VĀSAVADATTĀ. Give me the flowers and the leaves as well. I shall do it.

[PADMINIKĀ *hands her the basket.*]

What is the name of this flower?

PADMINIKĀ. I don't know, but they say it prevents widowhood.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. [*Aside.*] We shall use a great number. For both our sakes. [*Aloud.*] And what is this one called?

PADMINIKĀ. I don't know the name of that one either, but they say it restricts the influence of any other wife.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. I think perhaps we should overlook these.

PADMINIKĀ. But why? .

VĀSAVADATTĀ. His other wife is already dead. It would be a waste.

[*Enter MAID.*]

MAID. Quickly, madam, quickly. The bridegroom has already been conducted to the inner court.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. This is enough.

MAID. How beautiful.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. Take it in.

PADMINIKĀ. Very well. We leave you then. [*Both exit.*]

VĀSAVADATTĀ. Gone at last. All is over and I am here alone. My noble husband belongs now to another. I shall retire. I shall retire to bed to lie unaccompanied . . . even, I fear, by sleep.



# ACT FOUR

## Palace at Magadha

[Enter the JESTER.]

JESTER. [*Gleefully.*] Ha, ha! How nice to be around when there's a wedding. Especially at the wedding of a king and one so generous as my master, King Udayana. But I tell you things were grim. With good reason for it, of course, but there was so much moaning and weeping and . . . so on, that I thought the entire court was just going to sink right out of sight. But here we all are floating down the river again. We're in the palace of Princess Padmāvati, and we live here so well. Mmm. Would you believe I get to bathe in the harem's pool? It's true. And eat the most dees-scrumptious food? And watch the dancing nymphs. I tell you something. Sometimes I think this place is paradise on earth. [*Sadly.*] Except for two things. When I bathe the pool is empty. And, secondly, I have terrible indigestion. I have a nifty bed with silken sheets, but my stomach doesn't let me sleep a wink. There can be no happiness in this life for the sickly.

[Enter PADMINIKĀ.]

PADMINIKĀ. Now where could that fellow have gone? [*Walks about.*] Ah, ha! Vasantaka, where have you been hiding?

JESTER. [*With a leer.*] Sweet thing, why have you been searching?

PADMINIKĀ. The queen wishes to know if the bridegroom has finished his morning bath.

JESTER. And if he has . . . ?

PADMINIKĀ. Then I am to bring him garlands and perfume, what else?

JESTER. Just wondering. Tell her that yes, he is finished, and you may bring anything, everything—except . . . food.

PADMINIKĀ. Food? Is there something wrong with our food?

JESTER. Oh, nothing's wrong with your food, but everything's wrong with my stomach. Any food at all just makes my bowels whirl around like the eyes of a cuckoo.

PADMINIKĀ. Vasantaka, I hope you never change.

JESTER. Ah, away with you. For I must go to join the king.

[Exit JESTER, PADMINIKĀ remains.]

[Enter PADMĀVATĪ, COMPANION and VĀSAVADATTĀ.]

PADMINIKĀ. Why have you come to *this* pleasure garden, my Princess?

PADMĀVATĪ. We wanted to see if the sephalika flowers were in bloom yet, my dear.

PADMINIKĀ. They are indeed. And so red they look like gems upon the plant.

PADMĀVATĪ. Then play the jeweler, and we shall soon return.

PADMINIKĀ. Here is a stone bench for you to sit upon and I shall bring the flowers to you.

PADMĀVATĪ. Āvantikā, shall we sit together?

VĀSAVADATTĀ. As you wish. [Both sit.]

PADMINIKĀ. Princess, look at these. Handfuls of passionate color.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. What lovely flowers!

PADMINIKĀ. Shall I gather more?

PADMĀVATĪ. No. No, I think no more.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. Why is it you ask her to stop?

PADMĀVATĪ. You see, if my husband should come to this garden, the sight of their beauty on the trees would, I think, please him, and he would think better of me for it.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. Tell me, do you love this king, your . . . husband?

PADMĀVATĪ. I don't know. I don't know. But when we are apart my loneliness transcends all else.

COMPANION. How delicately she answers "Yes."

VĀSAVADATTĀ. [Aside.] This is too difficult.

PADMĀVATĪ. Yet one question remains unanswered in my mind.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. And what is that?

PADMĀVATĪ. Did my husband mean as much to Vāsavadattā as he does to me?

VĀSAVADATTĀ. More, I think.

PADMĀVATĪ. How do you know?

VĀSAVADATTĀ. [*Aside.*] Oh, not again. But, yes . . . [*Aloud.*] You see, she married him without her father's permission. Had she not loved him totally she could never have risked everything, and left her home for an unknown future.

PADMĀVATĪ. Why, yes . . . that's true.

COMPANION. Princess Padmāvatī, did you ever ask your husband to teach you how to play the lute?

PADMĀVATĪ. Yes I did. I asked him.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. What did he say?

PADMĀVATĪ. He said nothing. He only sighed deeply and became silent.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. What did that mean, do you think?

PADMĀVATĪ. I think the memory of Vāsavadattā passed before him, and only out of courtesy to me did he restrain his tears.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. [*Aside.*] How happy I would be if that were true.

[*Enter the KING and JESTER.*]

JESTER. Hoo, hoo! Look at all these flowers lying on the garden ground—as though someone tripped and spilled them. This way, sire.

KING. I shall follow you, friend Vasantaka. I shall . . .

(Verse 17: *Śārdūlavikrīḍita*)

They say the god of love may strike five arrows in one's heart  
And when I saw Vāsavadattā, he loosed them all in mine  
I feel them yet, but in this place their state is changed,  
A sixth appeared from him above, so the legend is wrong and  
I am in love.

**JESTER.** I wonder where the Princess Padmāvati is? Perhaps she's hiding in that arbor in the vines. Or waiting at the stone bench where blossoms lie upon the hill as thick as dots upon a leopard's skin? Or gone inside the grotto with its hordes of painted birds and sculptured beasts on every wall? No? Let me think. Hoo, hoo! A flight of cranes, sire, steady in the autumn sky, like the beautiful, outstretched arms of Baladeva.

**KING.** They are indeed.

(Verse 18: *Vasantatilakā*)

Their curves and angles, flights and falls in that unshattered line

Divide the unity of sky in two.

Imagine, though, the sky to be the spotless belly of a serpent, and then

Their undulating flight alone would show he does outgrow his skin.

**COMPANION.** Princess, look! A flight of cranes like a lotus garland resting on the sky. But, wait, King Udayana is here.

**PADMĀVATĪ.** My husband! I feel we must not meet him here since Āvantikā avoids all men. Come with me. Let us hide inside this jasmine bower.

**VĀSAVADATTĀ.** Quickly then. [*They walk about.*]

**JESTER.** Sire, it seems the Princess Padmāvati has been here.

**KING.** And how is that, my friend?

**JESTER.** The sephilika have been plucked from off these trees.

**KING.** The beauty of such flowers is rare, Vasantaka.

**VĀSAVADATTĀ.** [*Aside.*] Ah, to hear the name of Vasantaka returns me to my home again.

**KING.** Here is a stone bench. Let us sit and wait for Padmāvati to appear.

**JESTER.** Very well, sire, we shall. [*He sits.*] Hoo, hoo! I'm fried! [*He stands.*] The sun . . . and I, suggest we stand! But here's a jasmine bush to give us shade. This way, sire.

KING. In this, as in all things, I'll follow you. [*Both walk about.*]

PADMĀVATĪ. Vasantaka is about to spoil everything. What shall we do?

PADMINIKĀ. Princess, . . . I could shake the bush to irritate the bees.

PADMĀVATĪ. Yes, do. Perhaps we'll not be seen. [*MAID does so.*]

JESTER. Ah! Ooo! Help! Fire! Eee! Don't come near here. Please!

KING. What is it, Vasantaka?

JESTER. 'Cause I am being stung all over by a thousand bastard bees.

KING. Come, come, come! Step back and do not frighten them. Look.

(Verse 19: *Āryā*)

They are, with honey, drunk in passion-struck embrace.

And if our footsteps interrupt their play, will not they too become separate from their mates?

So, let us sit a little distance off.

JESTER. I couldn't think of a better idea. [*Both sit.*]

COMPANION. But, Princess, now we are imprisoned here.

PADMĀVATĪ. But, happily, only by my husband, dear.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. [*Aside.*] And mine. He looks well.

PADMINIKĀ. Princess, the lady's eyes are filled with tears.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. No, it is only that the flowers have flung their pollen in my eyes.

JESTER. Sire, since we're now in this secluded place may I ask you a personal question, hmm? May I?

KING. My ear is yours.

JESTER. Who do you love the most? Vāsavadattā that was before or Padmāvatī that is today?

KING. Now, now. Why is it that you ask me to make such a choice?

PADMĀVATĪ. The king is in an awkward position.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. [*Aside.*] And one that is unfortunate for me.

JESTER. Please speak without reserve. One is dead, the other nowhere near.

KING. No, no! I refuse to answer you at all, my friend and mynah bird.

PADMĀVATĪ. But your silence tells me everything that is.

JESTER. I swear to you, sire, no one will ever know. I'll seal my lips.

KING. That is impossible. And I'll not speak a word.

PADMĀVATĪ. How indiscreet and blind to miss the meaning of the king.

JESTER. You won't? Reconsider, sire, or I shall lock you up.

KING. What? You'll keep me here by force?

JESTER. By force.

KING. We shall see. We shall see.

JESTER. Forgive me, sire. A jester's jest is jest a jest. But in the name of friendship do please tell me.

KING. What to do? You give me no escape.

(Verse 20: *Āryā*)

There is no one of greater beauty, gentleness, and grace than  
Padmāvati,  
But Vāsavadattā still enchains my heart.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. [*Aside.*] And may it ever be. His words give recompense for all my pain.

COMPANION. That's not a very courteous thing to say.

PADMĀVATĪ. Not at all, my dear. It is noble of the king to recall the virtue of Vāsavadattā

VĀSAVADATTĀ. My dear child, such generous words are worthy of your birth.

KING. But enough, I have spoken, and now I ask you to choose between the two: Vāsavadattā that was before or Padmāvati that is today.

PADMĀVATĪ. The tables are turned.

JESTER. Come, sire, do not waste your time in idle chatter. I like them both. Quite a lot. About the same.

KING. Ho, ho! You compelled me to speak and now you are afraid yourself.

JESTER. And would you use force?

KING. I would, of course.

JESTER. My mouth is glued.

KING. Forgive me, O mighty Brahmin. Speak of your own free will.

JESTER. Good! I'll tell you. Vāsavadattā I keep in high regard and Padmāvati has beauty, gentleness, and grace. But she has one other crowning virtue: she slips me first-class tidbits and I just stuff my face.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. [*Aside.*] Ah, Vasantaka. His stomach is greater than his memory, alas for me.

KING. But when I tell Vāsavadattā this . . .

JESTER. Ah! Vāsavadattā? She died long ago.

KING. [*Sadly.*] Ah, yes, yes! I had forgot.

(Verse 21: *Anuṣṭubh*)

When I think of happiness, Vāsavadattā comes to mind.

Your cleverness confuses me, and without thought I speak her name.

PADMĀVATĪ. Just then the king was so lighthearted, but now that mood is gone.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. [*Aside.*] Who would think there were such consolation in hearing words while hidden in a glade?

JESTER. Sire, do not despair. What can we do? We can't force fate.

KING. My friend, I think you cannot understand.

(Verse 22: *Śālinī*)

Passion may fade within any heart, but memory will not permit its theft:

Thus sorrow lives within any heart, and only through weeping can I seek a tranquil mind.

JESTER. [*Aside.*] He weeps. I shall bring water to wash away his tears.

PADMĀVATĪ. My husband's face is veiled behind a film of tears. Now is the time for us to slip away.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. Yes, let us go. Or, rather, you should stay. It would be wrong for you to leave your husband in this state. I shall return . . . alone.

COMPANION. What she says is true, Princess. You should be with him.

PADMĀVATĪ. Do you think so? Shall I approach him?

VĀSAVADATTĀ. Yes, my dear. You should.

JESTER. [*Entering with a lotus leaf filled with water.*] Princess Padmāvatī?! Here?

PADMĀVATĪ. Vasantaka, what's the matter?

JESTER. This is . . . what? [*Gestures.*] Water. The king . . . the . . .

PADMĀVATĪ. Yes?

JESTER. The waving flowers have flung their pollen in his eyes, and now his face is wet with tears. Here is water you may give him to bathe his face.

PADMĀVATĪ. [*Aside.*] A servant will be no less kind than his master. [*Approaching, aloud.*] My lord. Here is some water for your face.

KING. Padmāvatī! [*Takes the water, aside to JESTER.*] Vasantaka, what is this . . . [*He sips water.*]

JESTER. It's like this . . . [*Whispers in his ear.*]

KING. Oh, I see. Very good. [*Lightly bathes his eyes.*] Princess, please. Sit down.



PADMĀVATĪ. As you wish, my lord. [Sits.]

KING. Padmāvati.

(Verse 23: *Anuṣṭubh*)

Wind-blown pollen from the flowers  
Causes tears to wet my face.

(Verse 24: *Anuṣṭubh*)

[*Aside*] My wife has courage though but a youth.  
I'll not distress her with the truth.

JESTER. [*Softly.*] Sire, this afternoon . . . ? King Darśaka her father . . . ? He's holding court, sire. You're the honored guest; you can't be late. In matters of courtesy, sire, the best policy is to do whatever the other fellow wants. [*Aloud.*] And since His Majesty is expecting you, we'd better make a move. [*Softly.*] Mmm?

KING. Ah, yes indeed. A good suggestion.

(Verse 25: *Anuṣṭubh*)

Men of generous hospitality are to be found in every nation.  
There are far fewer, unfortunately, who show to them appreciation.

[*Exeunt.*]

## ACT FIVE

[*Enter PADMINIKĀ*]

PADMINIKĀ. Madhukārikā! Madhukārikā! Quickly, quickly!  
Come here.

MADHUKĀRIKĀ. [*Entering.*] Here I am. What is it you want?

PADMINIKĀ. Have you heard that Princess Padmāvati is suffering from a terrible headache?

MADHUKĀRIKĀ. Oh, no! I didn't know.

PADMINIKĀ. Well, she has. Now run quickly and tell Āvantikā.

MADHUKĀRIKĀ. But, why?

PADMINIKĀ. Because as soon as she hears of it she will surely come and tell the princess pleasant stories to soothe the pain.

MADHUKĀRIKĀ. All right. Where have you arranged the princess' bed?

PADMINIKĀ. In the Ocean Pavilion. Now, go quickly. I will tell Vasantaka to inform the king.

MADHUKĀRIKĀ. All right. *[Exit.]*

PADMINIKĀ. Now where could that fellow be?

JESTER. *[Entering, to himself.]* Love is strange. Love is strange. Every day within his heart there is a flame of love for Vāsava-dattā, but I think these days his marriage with Padmāvati makes it burn brighter than before. So joy only makes him sad. *[Sees PADMINIKĀ.]* Hello, Padminikā, what's the news with you?

PADMINIKĀ. Did you know that Princess Padmāvati has a terrible headache?

JESTER. No!

PADMINIKĀ. She has.

JESTER. I didn't know.

PADMINIKĀ. I know.

JESTER. You know?

PADMINIKĀ. Yes! Now go quickly to tell the king, and I shall bring the ointment for her head.

JESTER. Where are they putting the princess' bed?

PADMINIKĀ. In Ocean Pavilion.

JESTER. Well, go along then, and I'll tell the king.

*[Exeunt, enter the KING.]*

KING.

(Verse 26: *Vasantatilaka*)

Now again, as time has passed, I have a second wife. But my mind cannot forget the beauty of her who first was mine, And who perished in the flames at Lāvāṇaka like a lotus in the frost.

For she perished in the flames like a lotus in the frost.

JESTER. [*Entering.*] Sire! Sire, come quickly!

KING. Why? What is it?

JESTER. Princess Padmāvati has been stricken with an awful headache.

KING. How do you know?

JESTER. Padminikā told me.

KING. Oh, no.

(Verse 27: *Vasantatilakā*)

The virtue of the beautiful Padmāvati has somewhat dulled  
my former pain.

At these words my heart grows weak from fear that she may  
leave me too.

Where is she now?

JESTER. They put her bed in the Ocean Pavilion.

KING. Quickly, show me there.

JESTER. This way, sire, follow me. [*They walk about.*] This is the  
pavilion, sire. It's all right to go in.

KING. Enter first, my friend.

JESTER. Very well. [*Enters.*] Oh, no! Help! Sire, stand back!

KING. Why? What is it?

JESTER. There is a cobra stretched along the floor! I saw it in the  
lamp light.

KING. [*Enters, looks round, smiles.*] Those who call you Fool are  
sometimes not far wrong.

(Verse 28: *Vasantatilakā*)

A garland from the entrance arch has fallen down upon the  
ground.

The flowers, gently coiled, are made serpentine by evening's  
breeze.

JESTER. [*Looks carefully.*] You know there are many things in this  
world that are not cobras. [*Looks round.*] Oooo . . . Princess  
Padmāvati seems to have come and gone.

KING. No, my friend, she could not have been here.

JESTER. How do you know that, sire?

KING. What is there to know?

(Verse 29: *Śardūlavikṛtita*)

The sheets of the bed are smoothly stretched;  
The pillow is not crushed or stained.  
There are no decorations to divert a restless gaze;  
And one, so ill in bed, does not simply melt away.

JESTER. You're right, and I conclude she has not yet arrived.  
Therefore, sire, *you* sit on the bed and wait until she's here.

KING. Very well. [Sits.] Oh, I feel so very sleepy. Why don't you tell me a story?

JESTER. Ooo! A good idea. But you'll have to make a sound now and then so I know you're listening. Like "Hannh!" All right?

KING. Hannh.

JESTER. Good. Now . . . once upon a time the most delightful bathing pools existed in the city of Ujjayinī . . .

KING. [Rising up.] Ujjayinī?! Ah, Ujjayinī.

JESTER. What's the matter? I can change the story, sire.

KING. No, I am sure it's fine. Only . . .

(Verse 30: *Upajāti*)

It calls to my mind Vāsavadattā leaving Ujjayinī to become my queen.  
The tears that she wept while leaving her father, I still remember piercing my breast.

(Verse 31: *Anuṣṭubh*)

Often when she played upon the lute, the quill would tumble down from out of her hand.  
Through tears in her eyes she would look into mine while gently strumming the silent air.

JESTER. I think I'd better change the story. Sire, the town was called Brahmadatta, and the king who ruled there was named Kampilya.

KING. What did you just say?

JESTER. [*Patiently.*] The town was called Brahmadatta, and the king who ruled there was named Kampilya!

KING. Fool, fool. You mean the king was Brahmadatta and the city was Kampilya.

JESTER. The king was Brahmadatta ruling in Kampilya town?

KING. Of course.

JESTER. Sire! Just a minute while I relearn my lines. "King Brahmadatta ruling in Kampilya town." [*Repeats this several times.*] O.K., I've got it! Sire, listen to this. . . . He's sound asleep. Ooo, it's getting chilly. I think I'd better go get a shawl for myself. [*Exit.*]

[*Enter VĀSAVADATTĀ, dressed as Āvantikā, and MAID.*]

MADHUKĀRIKĀ. I am sent to tell you, madam, that the princess is suffering from a painful headache.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. I'll come at once. Where has the bed of Padmāvati been arranged?

MADHUKĀRIKĀ. In the Ocean Pavilion.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. Please come with me. [*They walk about.*]

MADHUKĀRIKĀ. Here is the entrance. Please go in and I will hurry with the ointment for her head. [*Exit.*]

VĀSAVADATTĀ. The gods could not be more unkind. Padmāvati, the only source of comfort for my husband in his sorrow, has herself been taken ill. I shall go in. [*Enters and looks around.*] How thoughtless are the servants to leave her ill with no companion save a single lamp. At least she's now asleep. I will sit down. To sit apart would seem as though I had but little love for her. . . . I shall sit upon the same bed, at one side. [*Sits.*] How strange that as I sit beside her my heart seems light with joy. Happily her breathing seems relaxed. She must be feeling better now. Stretched upon no more than half the bed, she seems almost to ask the comfort of embrace. I shall lie down.

KING. [*Talking in his sleep.*] O Vāsavadattā!—

VĀSAVADATTĀ. [*Starting up.*] Ah! My husband! Padmāvati is not here at all! Have I been seen? Oh, no, for if I have, the entire scheme is destroyed and Yaugandharāyaṇa will have failed.

KING. O daughter of the Ujjayinī king!

VĀSAVADATTĀ. Happily he only speaks within a dream. We are alone . . . we are alone. I will stay a little to comfort both my eyes and my heart.

KING. My love! My perfect wife! Speak to me.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. I will answer him. I will.

KING. Are you angry with me?

VĀSAVADATTĀ. Oh, no! No, no! Only so unhappy.

KING. If you are not angry why do you not wear the jewels that I gave you?

VĀSAVADATTĀ. What do I say?

KING. Are you thinking of my other loves?

VĀSAVADATTĀ. Oh, no! Not here. Not now.

KING. Forgive me for that pain. I beg you.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. Too long! I must not stay! Someone will come and I must not be seen. Let me only rest his hand upon the bed and go.

KING. Vāsavadattā! Vāsavadattā, stay! Do not go!

(Verse 32: *Anuṣṭubh*)

In hurrying out the door, I strike my head upon the frame.  
So perhaps there's no way out at all.

I feel such frustration at not being able to keep her from slipping away.

JESTER. [*Entering.*] Sire, you're awake.

KING. My friend! My friend, I have good news. Vāsavadattā is alive.

JESTER. Vāsavadattā? Sire, she's dead—and long ago.

KING. No, no. Not so, my friend.

(Verse 33: *Anuṣṭubh*)

As I lay sleeping on this couch she wakened me, then disappeared.

My ministers deceived me of her death within those flames.

JESTER. Impossible, sire. Such a thing could never be. Perhaps my mention of Ujjayinī returned her to your mind. You only saw her in a dream.

KING.

(Verse 34: *Anuṣṭubh*)

Perhaps I dreamt, but I would rather live forever in that dream.

For she was there—an illusion, a fair illusion as reality.

JESTER. Sire, there is a mysterious lady in the palace named Āvantikā. It must have been her that you saw.

KING. No!

(Verse 35: *Anuṣṭubh*)

I tell you I knew her eyes and I saw the long, unbraided hair.

(Verse 36: *Anuṣṭubh*)

Though in a dream she touched me, I can feel it still.

JESTER. These imaginings are futile, sire. Come, come. Let's go to the ladies' court.

CHAMBERLAIN OF MAGADHA. [*Entering.*] Victory to you, O noble king. Our King Darśaka sends you this message. Your general, Rumaṇvat has just arrived bringing a great army with which to attack your enemy Āruṇi. Our army of Magadha together with your horses, elephants, and charioteers is prepared to do battle. Therefore, arise!

(Verse 37: *Śārdūlavikrīḍita*)

There is division among your enemies but confidence within your ranks.

Your advance will be protected from behind and all await you, O king.

We all await you, O king, to lead us on to glorious victory.

We have already crossed the river ranges, and the land of Kauśāmbī is in sight.

KING. Excellent, indeed.

(Verse 38: *Upendravajra*)

Our arrows shall fall in waves that crash down upon his ranks.

Our elephants and horses will assault him triumphantly.

And triumphantly shall march upon the ocean of his sin,  
upon the ocean of his sin, upon the ocean of his sin.

## ACT SIX

*At UDAYANA'S court*

CHAMBERLAIN OF UJJAYINĪ. [*Entering.*] Who is on duty here at this Gate of Gold?

VIJAYĀ. [*Entering.*] I am, sir. Vijayā. What is it you wish?

CHAMBERLAIN OF UJJAYINĪ. Go to Udayana, whose glory has been enhanced by capture of Kauśāmbī, and say to him: the minister of Mahāsena and the nurse of his daughter Vāsavadattā have arrived and are waiting at the gate to speak with him.

VIJAYĀ. Sir, this is not the proper time nor place for any message.

CHAMBERLAIN OF UJJAYINĪ. Not the proper time nor place? And why is that?

VIJAYĀ. This morning in the Eastern Palace there was a man playing on a lute. When the king heard it he said, "Ah, that is the sound of Ghoṣavatī, Vāsavadattā's lute."

CHAMBERLAIN OF UJJAYINĪ. And then?

VIJAYĀ. Then going up to him, he asked the man how he had come by it. The man replied, "I found it lying in a thicket on the banks of a river. If you have any use for it, I'll gladly give it to you." But when the king took it into his lap, he fainted away. When he recovered, he said in tears, "I have found you, Ghoṣavatī, but her I cannot find!" So you see? How can I take your message now?

CHAMBERLAIN OF UJJAYINĪ. I think you should, for our purpose in coming here concerns his grief.



VIJAYĀ. Very well. But, see! The king is descending from the palace. I'll inform him at once.

CHAMBERLAIN OF UJJAYINĪ. Please do.

[Enter JESTER and KING holding a lute.]

KING.

(Verse 39: *Puṣpitāgrā*)

Ah, Ghoṣavati, sweet lute, you who often lay upon the lap of my young queen,  
How is it that you have come to dwell within the lonely silence of the forest all alone?  
O Ghoṣavati, you are unfeeling to forget the gentle Vāsavadattā:

(Verse 40: *Vasantatilakā*)

How she did gently wrap her arms around your waist,  
And embraced you tenderly beneath her breasts.  
She did mourn when I had to go away leaving you both behind,  
But smiled and cooed when we three once more came together.

No, my friend, I can do nothing else.

(Verse 41: *Anuṣṭubh*)

My passion, recently asleep, once again has sprung to life.  
But she who loved the music of this lute does not accompany it.

Vasantaka, take Ghoṣavati to a craftsman for new strings and bring it back to me with haste.

JESTER. I shall, at once. [Exit.]

VIJAYĀ. Sire, a minister from Ujjayinī and the nurse of Vāsavadattā are both waiting at the gate.

KING. Go then and call Padmāvati.

VIJAYĀ. I'll go at once. [Exit.]

KING. So short a time! How quickly the marriage news has reached the ear of my father-in-law.

[Enter VIJAYĀ and PADMĀVATĪ.]

VIJAYĀ. This way, Princess.

PADMĀVATĪ. My lord.

KING. Padmāvati, have you heard? A minister from Mahāsena and the nurse of my first wife have arrived in Magadha, wishing to speak with me.

PADMĀVATĪ. I shall be happy to hear tidings of my relatives, my lord.

KING. It is worthy of you to speak of Vāsavadattā's family as though it were your own. Will you sit down?

PADMĀVATĪ. When you receive these people do you wish to have me seated at your side?

KING. What is the harm in that?

PADMĀVATĪ. You now have a second wife. It may cause a feeling of unease.

KING. I would feel less at ease to hide away my wife from friends. The seat is yours.

PADMĀVATĪ. As you wish, my lord. [Sits.] I am uncertain as to how her parents feel.

KING. To be sure.

(Verse 42: *Vasantatilakā*)

As one who stole his child but could not keep her free of harm,

My heart is not at rest concerning words he very well may speak.

The shadow of ill fortune has overcast my honor,

And I am like a tiny child, who angering his father, feels afraid.

PADMĀVATĪ. Sire, one may not delay a thing whose hour has come.

VIJAYĀ. The minister and the nurse are at the gate, sire.

KING. Conduct them in at once.

VIJAYĀ. It shall be done. [*Exit, reenter with the CHAMBERLAIN OF UJJAYINĪ and NURSE OF VĀSAVADATTĀ.*]

CHAMBERLAIN OF UJJAYINĪ.

(Verse 43: *Vasantatilakā*)

Having come to visit the kingdom of this relative, I feel happy,

But remembering again the death of Vāsavadattā, I am sad.  
O fate, could you not have returned the kingdom to Udayana  
Without the theft of his young queen, without the theft  
through death of his young queen.

VIJAYĀ. Here is the king. You may approach.

CHAMBERLAIN OF UJJAYINĪ. Udayana, king of Kauśāmbī. May you always reign!

KING. [*Respectfully.*] Sir,

(Verse 44: *Anuṣṭubh*)

Your king is one who may control the royal dynasties of earth.

Your royal kinsman I respect; tell me, Chamberlain, is he well?

CHAMBERLAIN OF UJJAYINĪ. Mahāsenā is well indeed, and inquires if all be well with you.

KING. [*Rising.*] What is the wish of Mahāsenā?

CHAMBERLAIN OF UJJAYINĪ. This courtesy is worthy of your noble birth, sire. But you need not stand to hear the message that I bring.

KING. If that be Mahāsenā's wish.

CHAMBERLAIN OF UJJAYINĪ.

(Verse 45: *Anuṣṭubh*)

You have my praise at recovery of your kingdom from the foe. It is said

In truth, "The timid and the weak lack energy,  
That quality alone which makes a king."

KING. The recovery of Kauśāmbī was possible only through the power of Mahāsenā.

(Verse 46: *Harinī*)

When I did live with him I was treated as his son,  
 Until I came away with his child whom I then lost.  
 Yet when he hears of her decease he gives me still his high regard,  
 And is the cause of my success.

CHAMBERLAIN OF UJJAYINĪ. You have heard the words of King Mahāsenā. This lady brings you a message from the queen.

KING. Ah, tell me, nurse.

(Verse 47: *Anuṣṭubh*)

She who is the goddess of the city, she who is chief among the sixteen queens of Mahāsenā—  
 My mother, tortured with the grief of our departure—tell me is she well?

NURSE OF VĀSAVADATTĀ. The queen is well. She inquires of your health and of all those people that are yours.

KING. Mine? The people that are mine? Ah, yes, yes, they are well. Those in whom health there is.

NURSE OF VĀSAVADATTĀ. Now, now, my lord. Do not torment yourself.

CHAMBERLAIN OF UJJAYINĪ. Compose yourself, my lord.

(Verse 48: *Śālinī*)

Though dead, our master's child is yet alive when she is mourned.  
 Where is that man who can postpone the unknown hand of death,  
 Or when the rope will break, catch safe the pitcher as it falls?  
 One law controls both trees and men: we grow, and then we end.

KING. Do not say so. For,

(Verse 49: *Anuṣṭubh*)

Mahāsenā's daughter was my pupil and beloved queen,  
 Whom I cannot forget, nor will, in all the births to come.

NURSE OF VĀSAVADATTĀ. My lord, I bring to you these words,  
 "Vāsavadattā is no more, but you are as dear to us as our two

sons and from the first we hoped she would become your wife. That is why we brought you to Ujjayinī and by the pretext she should learn the lute, we placed her in your hands without the witness even of the ritual fire. In your impetuosity you both did run away without the benefit of nuptial rites, but when you'd gone we had two portraits drawn upon a panel and in your absence tied the marriage knot. We send those portraits to you now and hope, my son, they comfort you."

KING. How warm and lovingly she speaks.

(Verse 50: *Anuṣṭubh*)

Her words mean more to me than conquest of a hundred thrones.

For despite all my transgression I am not forgotten in her love.

PADMĀVATĪ. May I see this portrait of her who is to me an elder sister, that I may pay respect, my lord?

NURSE OF VĀSAVADATTĀ. [*Handing her the panel.*] Here you are, Princess.

PADMĀVATĪ. [*Aside.*] Why! This face is very like the lady of Ujjayinī. [*Aloud.*] Sire, does this image bear a close resemblance to your wife's?

KING. Resemblance? No. I think it is her face itself.

(Verse 51: *Anuṣṭubh*)

How could this loveliness be so cruelly destroyed?

How could fire ravage the sweetness of this face?

PADMĀVATĪ. May I see the portrait of the king to judge if the other be well drawn or not.

NURSE OF VĀSAVADATTĀ. Here you are.

PADMĀVATĪ. [*On seeing it.*] It is exact. The other must be true as well.

KING. Why is it that just now while looking at the picture, you seemed first pleased and then perplexed?

PADMĀVATĪ. My lord, there is a lady living here whose image is the double of your wife's.

KING. What? Of Vāsavadattā?

PADMĀVATĪ. Yes.

KING. Send for her at once!

PADMĀVATĪ. You see, before my marriage a certain Brahmin, saying that she was his sister, left this lady in my charge because her husband was away. She therefore shuns the sight of other men, but on some pretext I shall bring her here before you that you may see and judge for yourself whom she might be.

KING.

[*Aside.*]

(Verse 52: *Anuṣṭubh*)

If a Brahmin's sister, she is someone else.

Yet nature does not duplicate its forms.

VIJAYĀ. [*Entering.*] My lord, there is a Brahmin from Ujjayini waiting at the door who says he placed his sister in Princess Padmāvatī's care and has returned to take her back.

KING. Padmāvatī, can it be he?

PADMĀVATĪ. Let us see, my lord.

KING. Offer this Brahmin the formalities appropriate to the inner palace and conduct him here at once.

VIJAYĀ. It shall be done, my lord. [*Exit.*]

KING. Padmāvatī, will you now bring the lady here?

PADMĀVATĪ. I will, my lord. [*Exit.*]

[*Enter VIJAYĀ and YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA.*]

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. Ah!

[*Aside.*]

(Verse 53: *Vasantatilakā*)

Though in the interests of the king I had concealed his queen  
And acted for his benefit alone,

Now that success has crowned all my attempts,

My heart misgives to hear the judgment of my means.

VIJAYĀ. Here is the king. You may approach.

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. Accept my salutations, sire.

KING. It seems to me I know this voice. Honored Brahmin, was it you who left your sister in the care of Padmāvatī sometime in the past?

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. Indeed I did.

KING. [To VIJAYĀ.] Conduct his sister here at once without delay.

VIJAYĀ. It shall be done, my lord. [Exit.]

[Enter PADMĀVATĪ, VĀSAVADATTĀ behind curtain.]

PADMĀVATĪ. Will you come with me, my dear? I have good news for you.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. And what is that?

PADMĀVATĪ. Your brother has just now returned.

VĀSAVADATTĀ. It is fortunate indeed that he has not forgotten.

PADMĀVATĪ. [Approaching the king.] My lord, we are here.

KING. Padmāvatī, if you now return your charge, we three will here be witness to the act.

PADMĀVATĪ. I return to you your sister, sir.

NURSE OF VĀSAVADATTĀ. [Looking behind the curtain.] It is she! The Princess Vāsavadattā!

KING. What! My queen? Padmāvatī! Escort her to my chambers.

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. No, no, no! She shall not go in. This lady, I tell you, is my sister, sire.

KING. What is it you are saying? Do you deny that this is the daughter of Mahāsena?

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. O King!

(Verse 54: *Anuṣṭubh*)

You were born a Bharata prince: pure, enlightened, self-controlled.

If you by force detain her here, you then despoil your noble line.

KING. Very well, but let us see the closeness of this resemblance.  
Draw aside the curtain.

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. Salutations to my noble king.

KING. What? Is this Yaugandharāyaṇa?

VĀSAVADATTĀ. Salutations to my noble husband.

KING. Oh. Vāsavadattā! It is she!

(Verse 55: *Anuṣṭubh*)

Is this now reality or dream in which I see her once again?  
I think I do perceive her here though once before I was de-  
ceived.

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. I am guilty of deception, sire, and took  
away your beloved queen. Is your forgiveness possible, my lord?  
[*He kneels at the king's feet.*]

KING. [*Raising him.*] Yaugandharāyaṇa, it is you.

(Verse 56: *Anuṣṭubh*)

By feigning madness or diplomacy,  
On battlefield or at the court—  
By your efforts I have been raised  
When everything had crumbled down.

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. We seek good fortune for our king, as the  
hallmark of our own prosperity, my lord.

PADMĀVATĪ. This then is Queen Vāsavadattā. In treating you as  
my companion I have improperly demeaned your rank. I bow to  
you, dear sister, and beg of you forgiveness. [*She kneels at*  
*VĀSAVADATTĀ's feet.*]

VĀSAVADATTĀ. [*Raising her.*] Rise, arise. You are a fortunate wom-  
an and even now you have no blame save for your too modest  
supplication at my feet.

PADMĀVATĪ. My gratitude is forever yours.

KING. Tell me, my friend, what was it that made you take away  
my queen?

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. There was just one reason: to maintain the  
glory of Kauśāmbī.



KING. And how is it that you put her in the care of Padmāvati?

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. Our astrologers predicted long ago that she was destined to become your queen.

KING. Did Rumaṇvat know of this?

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. Sire, everyone there it seems, knew.

KING. Ah, Rumaṇvat. That fellow's tears . . . !

YAUGANDHARĀYAṆA. My lord, allow the chamberlain and the nurse to return to Ujjayinī today so they may there declare that our queen Vāsavadattā is alive.

KING. No! No, no! You, Padmāvati, she and I to Mahāsena all together go.

## EPILOGUE

(Verse 57: *Anuṣṭubh*)

May this earth, which stretches to the borders of the sea and  
wears  
Himālaya and Vindhya as the pendants of each ear, enjoy the  
long and  
Prosperous reign of this, our sovereign lion King.



# PART III

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## THE THEORY OF *RASA*



*Rasa* is the central theoretical concept which informs Sanskrit theater, its plays, and their performance. As the *Nāṭyaśāstra* says, "nothing has meaning in the drama except through *rasa*." *Rasa* is the spectator's experience of "tasting" or "savoring" those specific emotional states which the characters in the play are portraying on the stage through words, actions, costume and makeup, and psychological expression appropriate to those emotions. Sanskrit theatrical theory recognizes eight basic human emotions (*bhāva*) that can be portrayed on stage and hence eight corresponding *rasa* experiences possible to the spectator. As M. Christopher Byrski comments in the discussions, perhaps the most accessible aspect of the *rasa* theory is just this concrete process whereby the theater artists provide on stage the precondition, the theatrical stimulus, for the *rasa* experience of the audience. But of what does the *rasa* experience, presumably, consist? Historically, how did the *rasa* concept develop? What is its validity, and indeed usefulness, to the spectator today who may be ignorant of the *rasa* expectation? These are questions to which there are no easy answers. In examining them, however, we may come to a clearer understanding not only of *rasa* but of Sanskrit theater in general.

Eliot Deutsch sets as his aim an investigation of what *rasa* is and whether *rasa* describes a universal or a purely Indian-bound aesthetic. *Rasa* does not lie in the art object (the performance) nor is it rooted in one's personal responses to a play: being neither objective nor subjective, *rasa* is the process of aesthetic perception itself. The ideal spectator is an active participant. In the *rasa* experience specific emotions in the performance are transmuted into generalized perceptions of these emotions. The ninth *rasa*, *śānta* (peace), added in later commentaries on the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, is charged with energy in drama and is not the same as mere emptiness.

Edwin Gerow places *rasa* in its historical context, tracing the meaning of *rasa* in its early application to the theater through three stages down to the present. Originally *rasa* was a critical principle by which a drama and its performance could be evaluated. It was the central organizing principle for the theatrical act, shaping the disparate elements of performance toward the *rasa*-end. It was the principle that distinguished theater from poetry, for

theater could not exist without *rasa*, while poetry could. After the decline of the living theatrical art, philosophers began to elaborate on the validity and the nature of the *rasa* experience. In time *rasa* became an "imperialistic" concept, an aesthetic standard for all the arts. In fact, *rasa* can be defined as a unity, an immediate awareness, an affect, and a whole. Gerow holds that it is not necessarily an Indian concept except insofar as these attributes are clearly recognized in Indian culture and less so in Western cultures. Examples of Western art exist which can be described in these terms and therefore can fit a *rasa* interpretation.

The nature of *rasa* was clarified and amplified in discussion. *Rasa* is both a state of being of the spectator and a climactic state. Further, *rasa* is often loosely and incorrectly used in referring to a play or performance ("the *rasa* of a play") when what is meant is the emotion of the play (*bhāva*); a play cannot "have a *rasa*" (V. Raghavan). Neither can the actor experience *rasa*, for he hasn't leisure to relish or savor emotions at the same time that he is portraying them on stage (P. J. Philips, Gerow; Raghavan disagrees). Not wishing to be too much sidetracked by other considerations, it is necessary to recognize that the *rasa* experience is "aesthetic joy or bliss"; it is a means of transmuting pain or unhappiness into pleasure (Gandhi). When you experience *rasa* you exhibit certain observable physical reactions (Byrski). Under the influence of the *rasa* imperative, characters in Sanskrit plays are not portrayed as individuals (as they are in Western drama) but as universal types; it is not expected that they will change, but the spectator, perceiving them, is moved and is changed (Deutsch, Raghavan). The ninth *rasa* may be older than is usually believed, in view of an important treatise on painting from the seventh century in which it is mentioned (Prithwish Neogy).

One issue broached in the papers of Gerow and Deutsch was returned to again and again in discussion. Is *rasa* a uniquely Indian concept or not? If it is, Western audiences face an enormous obstacle in attempting to appreciate Sanskrit plays. If it is not, what points have Indian and Western theater in common in relation to *rasa*? Some see *rasa* as culture-bound. *Rasa* cannot be a universal concept, for the *rasa* response depends upon specific and selected

cultural conditions (Deutsch). *Rasa* is not a possible response when a spectator is witnessing a Western tragedy (Gerow). *Rasa* must be culture-bound, since most of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is taken up with describing which particular theatrical and dramatic arrangement of elements is appropriate to stimulate one or another *rasa* experience; the resulting Sanskrit play and its performance consequently are wholly different in kind from, say a Greek tragedy (James R. Brandon). Subtle, nuanced elaboration upon a single emotional state, which is what should occur in a Sanskrit play performance according to the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, strikes a Western audience as boring. This is because a Western audience is not a "knowledgable" audience such as the *Nāṭyaśāstra* says is a requisite for *rasa*. A major problem in producing a Sanskrit play for Western audiences is that *rasa* clearly is an Indian aesthetic ideal which does not match any Western aesthetic. This is not to say that a non-Indian cannot experience *rasa*, but that it does require cultural conditioning first (Farley Richmond).

Others feel it is universal. *Rasa* is a universal principle of aesthetics, although there are obviously culturally derived, that is Indian, elements in the plays that bring it forth (Raghavan). If *rasa* is thought of as "aesthetic joy," then even Western tragedy gives aesthetic joy; in that sense the word *rasa* is indicating a universal human reaction in the face of art (Shanta Gandhi). There is nothing necessarily Indian about *rasa*, as indicated by the description of *rasa* in four non-Indian terms, but the Indianness of a Sanskrit play's content puts off the members of a Western audience and they can't have a *rasa* response. You could more easily get a *rasa* response from a Western audience by doing a non-Indian play, in fact (Gerow). The Westerner can feel *rasa* listening to Wagner, or at the Louvre. The difference is that the *rasa* response has been extricated, described, pinpointed, elaborated upon in India, but it has not been in the West (Byrski). The question was asked: Since theory arises to explain a body of literature which exists, what literature in the West would you suggest is similar to a *rasa*-based one (Rachel Van M. Baumer)? Because *rasa* is derived from emotions and is concerned with emotions (and not with intellectual content), melodrama or soap opera are close, though in the West

we denigrate them (Gerow). Soap opera exploits emotions, dwelling at length on simple emotional states, and to that extent is *rasa*-like, but there is an enormous difference: the process is crude in Western soap opera, it is marvelously refined and artistic in India (Baumer).

Apart from whether *rasa* is meant to indicate a general or a specific type of aesthetic response, why in India did the aesthetic aim supplant all other possible aims (Harold S. Powers)? (Some of the aims of Western theater are empathic response, entertainment, didactic instruction, intellectual argument, and, in modern times, incitement to social action.) In the Western view, while the system described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* for eliciting a *rasa* experience in the spectator is of a very high order and indicates a serious approach to art, it reduces the drama to saccharine emotionalism. In the *rasa* system sensibility is reduced to a kind of romantic absorption in the materials, that is, the emotions (*bhāva*) enacted on the stage. To a Western critic, the *rasa* standard describes a drama which is essentially trivial, at best a secondary form of production. Tragedy is, in fact, a better, a higher valuing principle (Gerow). Tragedy is based on conflict and the fall of a good man. In the Indian world view this is unacceptable; the Sanskrit play concludes with conflicts resolved harmoniously and smoothly, because that is how the Indian sees the world order. *Rasa* relates to this world, not to the world of Western tragedy (Gandhi).

# Reflections on Some Aspects of the Theory of *Rasa*

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*Eliot Deutsch*

INDIAN AESTHETICS, it is often said, consists fundamentally of the theory of *rasa*—the term *rasa* being variously translated as “flavor,” “desire,” “beauty”; that which is “tasted” in art.<sup>1</sup> I want to reflect on *rasa* not simply in the mode of exposition and interpretation, but in the spirit of seeking philosophical understanding; which is to say, I want to know what truth there is in (at least some aspects of) the *rasa* theory, and a truth, if such there be, which is not confined to traditional Indian drama, poetry, or music. I want, in other words, to examine *rasa* not as a culture-bound (and probably descriptive) concept, but as a potentially universal (and possibly prescriptive) concept in aesthetics—East and West.<sup>2</sup>

Where is *rasa* located? Is aesthetic experience essentially a *discernment* of qualities belonging to the object, the artwork, or is aesthetic experience essentially a special *response* of the experiencer, of the subject to the object? This question, which is so enduring in much of Western aesthetics, with the differing answers giving rise to (or at least being closely associated with) theories about art as “expression,” as “communication,” as “objectified pleasure” and the like, was raised by the writers on the *rasa* theory and was summarily dismissed by Abhinavagupta. He writes:

The *Rasa* does not lie in the actor. But where then?  
... *Rasa* is not limited by any difference of space, time and knowing subject.<sup>3</sup>



And:

When we say that "*rasas* are perceived" (we are using language loosely) . . . for *rasa* is the process of perception (*pratyamāna eva hi rasah*) itself. . . .<sup>4</sup>

J. A. Honeywell then properly notes that:

It [*rasa*] is not an objective entity which exists independently of the experience as the object experienced; the existence of *rasa* and the experience of *rasa* are identical. The object of poetic experience is the poem, but nothing in the poem can be pointed out as its *rasa*.<sup>5</sup>

The essential quality of aesthetic experience, it is maintained, is neither subjective nor objective; it neither belongs to the artwork nor to the experiencer of it; rather it is the process of aesthetic perception itself, which defies spatial designation, that constitutes *rasa*. This view that the locus or *āśraya*, as it were, of *rasa* is nowhere, that *rasa* transcends spatial-temporal determinations, is, I believe, the only way open to us to understand the nature of aesthetic experience.

When we think of experience exclusively as experience of some thing or other in the other's bare reality or objective givenness, we run the danger of assuming that we need only be attentive and open (passively available, as it were) to what is there and the object will disclose itself fully to us and satisfy our interest in it—as though sense-mental experience can at that level of consciousness be shorn of all the interpretative categories of the experiencer. In aesthetics this "objectivist" attitude leads to a one-sided formalistic concern that often sees aesthetic value only in configurations of lines and shapes, in abstract movements and the like (Clive Bell) and that tends to think of creativity in formulae-making or rule-following terms.

On the other hand, when we think of experience (as perhaps most of us do) as it is entirely a matter of *our* response to some thing or other, as *our* feeling or emotion, we are disposed to rob the world of its values and to assume, in a narrow and ego-centered way, that our own precious feelings and moods constitute the world. We believe then that every thing and every one is basically an *occasion* for our experience; which leads us to believe further that experience is a matter of (indifferent) causes yielding (valuable) effects. In art and aesthetics this way of thinking leads to a

one-sided romanticism, which finds nothing of value except in what may be located in a wayward subjectivity, and to gross sentimentality, where everything about the object may be reduced to and lost in titillating feelings or emotional paroxysms. Here we no longer experience the artwork but only ourselves.

The *rasa* theory suggests that we can avoid these and other less extreme forms of spatializing aesthetic experience (and thereby misunderstanding it) if we understand aesthetic experience as a special process wherein the artwork *controls* rather than causes the response of the experiencer, and wherein the experiencer must also bring a highly developed understanding, sensitivity, and life history to bear on the work. To understand aesthetic experience in this way requires that we also understand that the content of art is never (or at least *ought* never to be) just the personal emotions or thoughts of either the artist or the experiencer. M. Hiriyanna rightfully points out that "the poet's own feeling, according to the *Rasa* view, is *never* the theme of poetry."<sup>6</sup> And that:

As a result of their idealised character, art objects lose their appeal to the egoistic or practical self and appear the same to all. . . . They become impersonal in their appeal, and therefore enjoyable in and for themselves.<sup>7</sup>

It is precisely this impersonality (*sadharaṇīkaraṇa*) or trans-personality of aesthetic content which enables the artwork to serve as a bearer of meaning and the experiencer to rise to a heightened consciousness of his self and the world. "Meaning" requires a sharing or a shared experience; and this sharing is achieved in art only when there is an intense impersonality, an impersonality which, paradoxically because of its intensity, is at the same time highly individual. This is the case for aesthetic experience because aesthetic interest, in contrast to mere practical interest, is given not to the individual *qua* individual, but to the individual as it embodies, becomes, represents, expresses—whatever you will—a universal, *inter-personal*—and thereby—transcendent quality.

This transcendental or extraordinary (*alaukika*) dimension of *rasa* does then (but rightfully) impose a great task upon the artist.

The *rasa* is a generalized emotion, that is, one from which all elements of particular consciousness are expunged: such as the time of the artistic event, the preoccupations of the witness (audience), the specific or individuating qualities of the play or novel itself: place

and character chiefly. Portrayal of the events within the work, and characterization are thus the most delicate issues before the writer; inadequate portrayal—persistence of elements of particular consciousness—amounts to an obstacle.<sup>8</sup>

Art is a kind of *mimesis* according to the *rasa* theory; but it is an "imitation" of a very special kind, for *rasa* does not imitate things and actions in their particularity, in their actuality, but rather in their universality, their potentiality—and this "imitation" is said to be more real than any particular real thing. The theory would agree, then, with Aristotle that history has the task of relating what actually happens, while poetry (art) of what may happen; that history records the activities of particular things and beings, while art expresses the possibilities of man and nature, and the gods.

A generalized emotion, the *rasa* as expressive of universality, is not to be confounded, however, with a mere abstract or utterly dispassionate state of being. To depersonalize in art does not mean to destroy personality, but to allow for its transformation: it means to attain to a passional-cognitive state that is nevertheless spiritual in character. How is this possible?

According to the psychology underlying the *rasa*-theory experience is an awakening or manifestation of various innate states (*bhāva* or *sthāyibhāva*) which exist in the mind (or "heart") as latent impressions (*samskāra* or *vāsanā*) that derive from one's past experience. Eight of these potential emotional states are distinguished: (1) pleasure or delight (*rati*), (2) laughter or humor (*hāsa*), (3) sorrow or pain (*śoka*), (4) anger (*krodha*), (5) heroism or courage (*utsāha*), (6) fear (*bhaya*), (7) disgust (*jugupsā*), and (8) wonder (*vismaya*). These states, in their essential characteristics, are the same for everyone, coming as they do from a common human life-experience. In actual life each *bhāva* is said to be accompanied by causes (*karana*) which are understood to be the various situations and events of life that occasion an appropriate response; by effects (*kārya*), the various visible responses (gestures, facial reactions); and by concomitant elements (*sahakārin*), various accompanying but temporary mental states such as anxiety.

Every human being is born with a set of inherited instinctual propensities. His thoughts, actions, and experiences constantly generate impressions which sink back into the subconscious mind

ready to be revived on the conscious level. These impressions, which are called *saṃskāras* [or *vāsanā*] in Indian philosophy and psychology, are organized around emotions. The emotions are related to typical and universal situations and generate definable patterns of action. . . . Apart from these clearly organized basic emotions there are innumerable transit feelings and moods which accompany the former in any experience. . . . Anxiety, exultation, bashfulness, languor, etc., are examples.<sup>9</sup>

According to the *rasa* theory when these elements or dimensions of ordinary experience become elements or features of art and aesthetic experience they are called respectively determinants (*vi-bhāva*), the emotional situation that is presented in the drama; consequents (*anubhāva*), the physical changes or movements that signify emotional states; and transitory states (*vyabhicāribhāva*), the transient emotions that properly accompany various basic states. Abhinavagupta writes:

Rasa, in this connexion, is just that reality (*artha*) by which the determinants, the consequents and the transitory feelings after having reached a perfect combination (*samyag yoga*), relation (*sambandha*), conspiracy (*aikāgrya*)—where they will be in turn in a leading or subordinate position—in the mind of the spectator, make the matter of a gustation consisting of a form of consciousness free of obstacles and different from the ordinary ones. This Rasa differs from the permanent feelings [*bhāva*], consists solely in this state of gustation and is not an objective thing (*siddhasvabhāva*). . . .<sup>10</sup>

The *rasa* differs from the permanent feeling state, the *bhāva* or *sthāyibhāva*,<sup>11</sup> but is then correlated with it in the theory.

Such expressions as “the permanent sentiment becomes Rasa,” are due to the correspondence (*aucitya*) only. This correspondence, to specify, is due to the fact that the very same things which were previously considered to be causes, etc., related to a given permanent sentiment, now serve to realize the gustation, and are thus presented in the form of determinants, etc.<sup>12</sup>

The “correspondence,” then, between the permanent feeling states and *rasa* produces the basic *rasas*: (1) the erotic (*śṛṅgāra*); (2) the comic (*hāsyā*); (3) the pathetic or compassionate (*karuṇa*); (4) the furious (*raudra*); (5) the heroic or valorous (*vīra*); (6) the terrible (*bhayānaka*); (7) the odious (*bībhatsa*), and (8) the marvelous (*adbhuta*). To this standard list Abhinava, perhaps following some

earlier writers whose works are not available,<sup>13</sup> added a ninth, *śānta*, or "the peaceful," *rasa*.

Now apart from the many subtle intricacies in this description of how a *rasa* arises the important issue for aesthetics, it seems to me, is the manner in which the *rasa* theory ties *rasa* to the patterns of life-experience and sees the *rasa* as a kind of radical transformation of the ordinary into the extraordinary (*alaukika*). The theory enables one to relate art to life in an intimate way and at the same time to grasp their essential differences. G. B. Mohan Thampi discusses the theory in these terms:

The characters and situations depicted in a poem have unique ontological status and our perception of them is *sui generis*. The special mode in which the poetic characters exist and are apprehended is indicated by the term *alaukika*, non-ordinary. In life our reactions to persons and objects can be described in terms of attraction, repulsion, or indifference. . . . Our responses are governed by positive or negative interests. Our attitudes of attraction, repulsion and indifference are put aside or transcended when we contemplate a character like Hamlet. . . .

In poetic experience emotions do stir and agitate our mind; but they do not move out in the form of action. Further, in poetic experiences the emotional states are not simply undergone or suffered; they are perceived and tasted.<sup>14</sup>

Aesthetic experience, therefore, is essentially a "relishing" of certain generalized emotions which are "objectified" in a vital form. Art is at once bound to life and is for itself. A work of art that occasions *rasa* is closely related to common experience, drawing as it does its own vitality, its aesthetic content, from those basic life emotions and situations that persons everywhere endure. Form in art has meaning only in relation to content; in fact, there is a form, the *rasa* theory suggests, only when for both the artist and the "spectator" there is a lived, deeply felt content. But a work of art is not a mirror of life; it is, once again, *alaukika*, extraordinary. It is *for itself*; which is to say, its content is uniquely aesthetic: it is there for apprehension, contemplation, participation; it is just there for sensitive understanding.

Aesthetic experience, according to the theory, is thus not something that is merely given, a fortuitous happening; it is an attainment, an accomplishment. "The tasting of Rasa," Abhinava

writes, "... differs from both memory, inference and any form of ordinary self-consciousness."<sup>16</sup> It requires a like-heartedness on the part of the experiencer and the overcoming of a number of formidable obstacles.

T. M. P. Mahadevan has pointed out that "the poet uses words in a way which involves a process of impersonalizing, and his poem gains the power of equal appeal to all. The reader who could enjoy the poem is a *sahṛdaya*, 'one of similar heart'."<sup>16</sup> Abhinava defines the *sahṛdaya* in his *Locana* as follows:

Those people who are capable of identifying with the subject matter, as the mirror of their hearts has been polished through constant repetition and study of poetry, and who sympathetically respond in their own hearts. . . .<sup>17</sup>

The ideal experiencer of art for the *rasa* theory is therefore not simply a passive *spectator* of but is an active *participant* in the work. As Hiriyantha states, the participant's "insight into the nature of poetry is, in point of depth, next only to that of the poet."<sup>18</sup> The realization of *rasa* thus makes rather extraordinary demands on the experiencer as well as on the artist.

... Rasa is, in any case, simply and solely a mental state which is the matter of cognition on the part of a perception without obstacles and consisting in a relish.<sup>19</sup>

Among the obstacles to the realization of *rasa* (which actually become demands made upon the experiencer-participant) that Abhinava distinguishes are:<sup>20</sup> (1) The lack of verisimilitude. We might consider this to be a failing more of the artwork and artist than of the experiencer of it, but Abhinava speaks of the obstacle as belonging essentially to the experiencer. "Indeed, if one considers the things presented as lacking in verisimilitude, he cannot obviously immerse (*vinivṛtṣ*) his consciousness in them. . . ."<sup>21</sup> He then goes on to say that "the means by which it is eliminated is the consent of the heart. . . ."<sup>22</sup>

One of the conditions for aesthetic experience for being a *sahṛdaya*, is that we be open to the artwork precisely as it is an artwork that is capable of controlling our experience of it. The "consent of the heart" means a kind of self-surrender to the object, an affirma-

tion of its being capable of sustaining our interest and attention. Most persons, most often, glance at artworks and receive in return only a fleeting impression (what the work is "about," who the artist is). The *sahṛdaya*, the one of similar heart, must be capable of and must exhibit a power of unselfconscious attentiveness in order that he may relish the *rasa* that is to arise.

(2) Another of the obstacles that Abhinava refers to is just this personal attachment to emotions. It is "the immersion in temporal and spatial determinations perceived as exclusively one's own or exclusively those of another."<sup>23</sup> It consists, he maintains, "in the appearance of other forms of consciousness, due variously to the fear of being abandoned by the sensations of pleasure, etc., to concern for their preservation. . . ."<sup>24</sup>

This "obstacle" is rather obscurely presented, but the overcoming of it is central to the realization of the *rasa* as distinguished from the appropriate *bhāva*. Abhinavagupta is arguing here that the subject, the participant-experencer, must universalize his own emotion by getting beyond the temporal-spatial specificity of his own immediate state of consciousness as this may be grounded in ego-needs and as it is bound to particular life-experiences. He must do this for the sake of recognizing the universalized emotion in the artwork, as it is given only in the work.<sup>25</sup>

The *sahṛdaya*, according to Abhinava, must be equal to the artwork; that is to say, he must be prepared to experience it properly. This may sound obvious: however, it is indeed the case, and it is often supported by aesthetic theories of an "art is communication" and "art is expression" variety, that most persons view aesthetic experience as a kind of therapy—of their bringing to an artwork a distraught consciousness for repair. It might very well be the case that experience of art yields a higher integration of self and a better ordered consciousness, but this is not something just produced by the artwork as though by some kind of causal efficacy; rather it is as well an achievement of the experencer in his relation to a cooperating work.

Plato taught that "the fairest music is that which delights the best and best educated, and especially that which delights the one man who is preeminent in virtue and education."<sup>26</sup> The Platonic judge and the *sahṛdaya* are alike in this; they represent the "aristocratic" ideal of taste. But who else if not the one who is like-

minded with the genius of the poet is best able to judge, to appreciate, to comprehend the poem?

*Rasa*, we have seen, is neither subjective nor objective. It may nevertheless be analyzed with emphasis given to the subject, the participant-experiencer (as we have done with the origination of the *rasa* in terms of the *bhāva*, the requirements of being a *sahṛdaya*, etc.) or to the object, the actual artwork. J. A. Honeywell explains nicely that

*Rasa*, which is the end of poetry in terms of process, becomes in terms of poetry as an object the organizing principle which determines the unity and wholeness of the composition. Seen in this way, it can be used to distinguish the major parts of the composition in terms of their functions within the whole. . . .<sup>27</sup>

And further:

Although *rasa* exists as an experience of a certain kind, it cannot be disassociated from the poetic object. The idea of *rasa* rests on the assumption that the poetic object is fully realized only in the experience of the competent reader. *Rasa* thus pertains to the experience of an audience in the presence of a poetic work and fully absorbed in that work. As such, the analysis of *rāsa* is inseparable from an analysis of the poetic object. The properties of *rāsa* must emerge as the actualization in experience of the properties of the object itself.<sup>28</sup>

Kant thought that the judgment of taste was entirely subjective, and yet necessary; that aesthetic judgments are compelling for the experiencer but that this doesn't require the determination of the properties or structure of the object. But Kant was wrong, and the *rāsa* theory is right; for one of the factors which clearly distinguish an artwork as a structured-content from a mere collection or aggregate of elements is the manner in which a feeling-tone suffices the work and gives unity to it. And if it is the case, as Susanne K. Langer maintains, that "Art is the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling,"<sup>29</sup> then that feeling-tone which unifies the work must at the same time be grounded in the deepest categorical structures of feeling; it must be transpersonal and universal; it must, in short, be the *rāsa*.

Feeling awakens feeling: a universalized mental state can be apprehended in aesthetic experience only if it is constitutive of the



artwork itself. The artwork as a whole becomes a *vibhāva*: it determines the experience. "To determine," it must be stated again, is different from "to cause." Cause-effect relationships, as we ordinarily understand them in the context of human experience, suggest an indifference and independence between the terms, which separation simply does not hold for art and aesthetic experience. And this is especially the case when the artwork is capable, through the creative imagination (*pratibha*) of the artist, of awakening in one who is prepared for it that special ecstatic unity of self and object wherein both achieve a completion of their being.

This brings us to our final consideration of the *rasa* theory: the concept of *śāntarasa* as put forward by Abhinavagupta and the opportunity this concept affords for distinguishing between aesthetic experience and what we might call pure spiritual experience.

*Śāntarasa*, according to Abhinava, is just that transcendental realization of unity that is joyful and peaceful. It is grounded in the Self and is realized as a kind of self-liberation.

. . . The *Ātman* alone possessed of such pure qualities as knowledge, bliss, etc. . . . is the *sthāyibhāva* of *śānta*.<sup>10</sup>

*Śānta rasa* is to be known as that which arises from a desire to secure the liberation of the Self, which leads to a knowledge of the Truth, and is connected with the property of highest happiness.<sup>11</sup>

*Śānta* is silence. What is silence in art? A work of art is constantly speaking, as it were, and yet it is mute, standing silently in its own concentrated being. The painting, the poem, the play is a center of silence and requires for its right apprehension an inner quietude, a silencing of desires and thoughts. Silence in art is not empty, like a container into which one might put anything, rather the artwork that is right for itself participates in a silence which is the profoundest truth of being, the silence which is a dynamic harmony of all being and becoming.

Silence in art, then, is not a mere absence of sound. *Śāntarasa* is a plenitude; it is surcharged with creative energy. The silence calls us out of ourselves to the concentrated being of the work itself.

And herein lies the essential difference between aesthetic experience in its highest form and pure spiritual experience: the artwork

calls our attention to it and controls our experience with it; the experience is temporal (albeit transforming); in spiritual experience the call is from that which is Real without division or object or time. The artwork, in the fullness of its experience as *śāntarasa*, points to Reality and participates in it. In pure spiritual experience there is only the Real.

To the enlightened—but only to the enlightened—all experience is *śāntarasa*.

## Notes

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1. The term *rasa* has had a long and varied use in Indian thought. As G. B. Mohan Thampi points out: "The dictionary records, among others, the following meanings: Sap, juice, water, liquor, milk, nectar, poison, mercury, taste, savor, prime or finest part of anything, flavor, relish, love, desire, beauty. The meanings range from the alcoholic [? hallucinatory] *soma*-juice to the Metaphysical Absolute—the *Brahman*. In different periods new meanings evolved out of earlier ones and in different disciplines *rasa* acquired different connotations." "'Rasa' as Aesthetic Experience," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 24, no. 1, pt. 1 (Fall 1965):76.
2. I do not, of course, want just to ignore or set aside the historical development of the *rasa* theory. It is important to recognize the different formulations of the theory from Bharata (second to fifth century?) in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, through such thinkers as Daṇḍin (seventh century) to Ānandavardhana in his *Dhvanyāloka* (ninth century) and Abhinavagupta (tenth century) in his *Abhinavabhāratī*, a commentary on the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, and his commentary, *Locana*, on the *Dhvanyāloka*, and to other later thinkers such as Viśvanātha (fourteenth century). For purposes of this paper I will work primarily from the position of Abhinavagupta. His formulation of the theory is generally considered to be the most philosophically interesting.
- It is also important, I think, to recognize the close relations that did obtain between the theory and the traditional arts of India, especially drama. The theory was formulated first with respect to aesthetic problems connected with drama: once formulated the *rasa* theory was then applied to, and refined in relation to, a rich variety of art forms. With a characteristic passion for classification and correspondences early Indian thinkers about music even correlated each single note of the octave with a specific *rasa*. See A. A. Baker, "The Aesthetics of Indian Music," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 4 (1964), pp. 47 ff.
3. *Abhinavabhāratī*. See Raniero Gnoli, *The Aesthetic Experience According to Abhinavagupta*, 2nd ed. (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1968), p. xxxvi.
4. Abhinavagupta, *Locana on Dhvanyāloka*, in *Śāntarasa and Abhinavagupta's*

- Philosophy of Aesthetics*, by J. L. Masson and M. V. Patwardhan (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1969), p. 73.
5. J. A. Honeywell, "The Poetic Theory of Viśvanātha," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 28, no. 2 (Winter 1969):168.
6. M. Hiriyanna, *Art Experience* (Mysore: Kavyalaya Publishers, 1954), p. 34.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
8. Edwin Gerow, "The Persistence of Classical Aesthetic Categories in Contemporary Indian Literature," in *The Literatures of India: An Introduction*, eds. E. C. Dimock, Jr., Edwin Gerow, and J. A. B. van Buitenen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974)
9. Mohan Thampi, " 'Rasa' as Aesthetic Experience," p. 76.
10. *Abhinavabhāratī*, in Gnoli, *The Aesthetic Experience*, p. 78.
11. In personal correspondence with the author Edwin Gerow has rightly pointed out that if we follow the implications of Abhinava's arguments we should "take the *rasa* as the *bhāva* from which the elements of particular consciousness (time, place, etc.) have been expunged. There is no cause and effect relation because the *rasa* is what is really there, and has been there; but in 'normal' experience, it is determined by the accidents of our daily and personal awareness, rather than in and of itself. This 'other-realization' is the peculiar capacity of the play, as instrument—but it creates nothing new—it simply reveals."
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 80–81.
13. See Edwin Gerow and Ashok Aklujkar, "On Śānta Rasa in Sanskrit Poetics," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 92, no. 1 (January–March 1972):81.
14. Mohan Thampi, " 'Rasa' as Aesthetic Experience," p. 77.
15. *Abhinavabhāratī*, in Gnoli, *The Aesthetic Experience*, p. 81.
16. T. M. P. Mahadevan, *The Philosophy of Beauty* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidhya Bhavan, 1969), p. 40.
17. *Abhinavabhāratī*, in Masson and Patwardhan, *Śāntarasa and Abhinavagupta's Philosophy of Aesthetics*, p. 78.
18. Hiriyanna, *Art Experience*, p. 41.
19. *Abhinavabhāratī*, in Gnoli, *The Aesthetic Experience*, p. 62.
20. Abhinava distinguishes seven obstacles in all, but the list is a rather curious one insofar as it includes elements which would appear to be taken account of entirely in terms of the artwork itself, and it includes a factor ("having the right means of perception") which is not so much an obstacle as simply a necessary condition for experience. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
25. Abhinava recognizes of course that it is largely up to the artist to aid in overcoming this obstacle. "The means of eliminating this obstacle," he writes, "are the so-called theatrical conventions (*nāṭyadharmī*), which include a number of things not to be found in ordinary life. . . ." *Ibid.*, p. 65.
26. *Laws*, 659a, trans. B. Jowett.
27. Honeywell, "The Poetic Theory of Viśvanātha," p. 166.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 169.
29. Cf. *Feeling and Form* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953).
30. *Abhinavabhāratī*, in Masson and Patwardhan, *Śāntarasa and Abhinavagupta's Philosophy of Aesthetics*, p. 131.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

# *Rasa* as a Category of Literary Criticism

What are the limits of its application?

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*Edwin Gerow*

THEORIES OF literary criticism develop in congenial literary contexts. Less abstract than philosophies, they can serve as grist for a *Wissenschaftssoziologie* that attempts to state the cultural preconditions of a formal intellectual theory. Literature is work of sensibility; that it takes as a principle some notion of "taste" ties it to a certain time and place more radically and meaningfully than any of the forms of expression that have a more theoretical grounding. Taste, viewed relationally, rather than in its psychological guise, is little more than the individual's capacity of discrimination refined to the prevailing expectations of a dominant or active social class, as codified in a (literary) style.

The Indian notion of *rasa* ought also to be discussed in its context, in terms of the kind of literature it was intended to explicate, rather than, let us say, exclusively in terms of the psychological reality it evinces. Realistically, there is considerable interplay between the condition of literature and literary criticism. A greater understanding of it should sharpen the perspective whereby we may view both as integral to a society's cultural expression. The alternative is an abstract view of literature as a mere product of convention; and an abstract view of aesthetics as a psychology. Both views have long plagued the study of Indian letters.<sup>1</sup> Only in mediating them is a relation between aesthetics and criticism established.

In this light we want to put forth a related but apparently contrary problem: Is the *rasa*-aesthetics applicable to other genres and to the literature of other times and places? This is not to raise again the question of the *rasa*'s validity in the sense of psychological reality, or as a state of mind (or emotion) having epistemological or ontological implications; but rather to ask just how tightly circumscribed the *rasa* (as an aesthetic principle) is by the literature which conditioned its proposition. This kind of query should enhance our perception of the functional *rasa* by testing its critical limits.

Both in its field of application (poetry in the broadest sense) and in its theoretical justification (*śāstra*), the notion of *rasa* shows a marked imperialistic tendency. From its beginnings in the discussions of Sanskrit drama, its partisans have sought on the one hand to bring under its explanatory aegis many other genres of literary and artistic production, and on the other, have claimed for the *rasa* greater and greater psychological or ontological validity. Indeed, the notion of *rasa* that emerges today is a result of this agglomerating tendency, so much so that we must account "universalizability" as more an intrinsic than an adventitious quality of *rasa*. Our task in seeking to determine the appropriate limits of the *rasa*'s applicability is thus not a static one; we must keep in view the apparent dynamics of *rasa* itself.

*Rasa* is one of the grand conceptions in the history of aesthetics. For most Indians today, *rasa* is the only aesthetic principle of their cultural heritage, uniting such diverse forms as music, sculpture, and epic poetry. In certain medieval schools of thought, *rasa* seems even to have transcended its aesthetic domain and become on the one hand a general principle of awareness having profound implications for epistemological psychology, and on the other, a concept of religious devotionism. In both, claims were made about its relation to absolute consciousness (*ātman*). Today, though somewhat overlaid with the sophisticated veneer of borrowed Western art forms and aesthetic categories, *rasa* continues to dominate Indian, especially Hindu, artistic endeavor. In the context of a multinational and multicultural world, *rasa* takes on much of the character of a properly Indian principle capable of differentiating, in some interesting sense, Indian art from other "kinds" of art. Clearly one must approach this concept with some respect, and the discussion must begin (to borrow a method from Aristotle)

with an attempt to differentiate some of the senses the term *rasa* has had in its long cultural and historical development. Only then can we hope to conceive the notion's limitations and understand what it can and cannot account for.

### RASA IN DRAMATIC CRITICISM

Taken as a whole, the sketch of *rasa* in Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the oldest work to concern itself with *rasa* as a definable aesthetic principle, suggests strongly that *rasa* developed its first aesthetic overtones in the context of the Sanskrit drama of the classical period. It emerged first as a principle of criticism in debates about the nature and function of drama as a discrete genre. It was not at first propounded as a universal principle—at least the texts give us no leave to this speculative conclusion—but rather as a differentia of one well established and highly valued genre. It is introduced, in terms borrowed from Indian logic, as the *lakṣaṇa* of drama: an invariably concomitant attribute which serves to mark drama apart from all else. *Rasa* does not begin its career either as a psychological principle or as an aesthetic principle—if by this we mean a universal principle—but as a critical principle.<sup>2</sup>

A general caveat is necessary at this point. In speaking of the earliest points of view attaching to the notion *rasa*—specifically those propounded in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*—we are, realistically speaking, quite dependent on later commentatorial tradition which often substitutes a coherent theory for the brief, laconic, and often equivocal formulae of the basic text. It is questionable whether we can have any coherent understanding in the oldest texts apart from their later commentators.

By restricting ourselves quite narrowly to a critical point of view—one wherein the aesthetic principles are seen chiefly in the context of their concrete application—we may be able to achieve a sense of the originality of *rasa* from the limited and quite literal references to it in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. This will be our method when dealing with the commentators themselves, whose notions of *rasa*, though intellectually based on the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, more directly reflect changing cultural realities in the ninth and later centuries.

We are also drawn to a consideration of *rasa*'s originality by the existence of contemporaneous critical theories that concerned other genres and did not emphasize *rasa*. S. K. De asserts:

Bharata's treatment would indicate that some system of Rasa, however undeveloped, or even a Rasa school, particularly in connexion with the drama, must have been in existence in his time.

As Dramaturgy was in the beginning a separate study, from which Poetics itself probably took its cue, the Rasa-doctrine, which sprang up chiefly in connexion with this study, confined its activity in the first stage of its development to the sphere of dramatic composition and exerted only a limited influence on poetic theories.<sup>3</sup>

Early *alaṃkāraśāstra*<sup>4</sup> (the "other" school, poetics), with its emphasis on figures of speech and formal distinctions, does not appear to spring from the same kinds of concerns as does the more integrative *rasa* doctrine. That it was born of an attempt to understand the formal strophic poetry (*kāvya*) as something quite different from narrative verse or drama, is evident. Yet the implications for criticism of this early tendency to differentiate genres seem lost on modern historians of Sanskrit poetics who persist in judging the early schools as imperfect statements of inherently universal poetic principles: "But the bearings of this doctrine [the *rasa*] on poetry [sc., *kāvya*] were seldom discussed, and the importance of Rasa as one of the essential factors of poetry was indeed naively understood but was not theoretically established."<sup>5</sup>

De also misses the sense in which the *rasa* theory is unique in the early period, seeing it only as the "glimmering" of a universal aesthetic. We cannot judge the critics of strophic poetry misguided because they ignored *rasa*. We must understand the apparent lacuna in terms of the critical principles they do adopt, principles that are inadequate only if they fail to function well without *rasa*. Similarly, the original *rasa*, if it appears motivated or required in the context of dramatic criticism, must correspond to certain poetic necessities of that genre, and is not simply a seed of what, in fact, follows it—the universalized *rasa* as developed most ably by Abhinavagupta. *Rasa* should be understood then, in its earliest form, not only as an integrative principle, but as a distinctive feature of the dramatic genre. That it occurred first in the context of the drama is a crucial, rather than an incidental, factor in its definition.

The structure of Bharata's text suggests, as Renou<sup>6</sup> and others have noted, a primary organization of performances of the drama into four elemental topics: *āṅgika* (representation by use of the body); *sāttvika* (emotions and sentiments); *vācika* (use of lan-

guage); and *dhārya* (the external aspects—costume, lighting, makeup, stage, and so on). Of these, the “sentimental” involves chiefly the extra-formal, emotional impact of the play, and of course, the audience’s consciousness at the time of, or as a result of, the play. Among this tetrad of topics defining the “complex” play the *rasa* is but one—a fragment of a whole. Indeed, the list of terms with which the sixth, or *rasa*, chapter begins, reads like a dictionary among which *rasa* has no special status. But here, as often, the Indian passion for cataloguing reveals a deeper purpose. Bharata seems interested in *rasa* as component precisely because it offers a rationale for stating the unity of this complex form that is the play. It is seen as an organizing mode which turns the elements, when properly perceived, into parts. Further, in virtue of that organic reevaluation, it can be said to constitute the end, or purpose of the play.<sup>7</sup> In Aristotelian terms, the end is not only a result, but a principle of organization which indeed requires material to organize, but which, more importantly, modifies that material in precise ways to conform to the expectation of the end as purpose. Thus *rasa* is a mood, an emotional consciousness, wherein all the disparate elements of the play—language, gesture, scenery—have a place and are understood not to be disparate. But also *rasa* is the principle which accounts for the kind of reality that makes the parts “dramatic.”

*Rasa*’s organic unifying character is brought out through several analogies, most directly by the one founded on the word etymology (“taste” or “sap/essence”). The “taste” of the various ingredients of a meal is both their common ground and organizes them as its end. But *rasa* is not only a result, and the emotions (*bhāva*) are not just causes.<sup>8</sup> On one level *bhāva* are already determined as concrete elements in the play. The *bhāva* is neither pure perception (*laukika*) nor pure aesthesis (*alaukika*), but an element for the first time organized in its discrete extension. The *rasa*, moreover, can be said to be the cause of the play, as the final cause explaining why it was put together in a particular way.<sup>9</sup> The *rasa* is the organic root of the total variety of the play and its disciplined form, just as a single essence underlies the transformation of seed to tree to flower in fruit (to seed) (*NS* 6.38: p. 294).

Aristotelian distinctions help to make sense of Bharata’s brief definitions and analogies, although the details are very different. Because the *rasa* is conceived as a mode of apprehension that is



both immediate ("in" the theater) and more general than verbal apprehension (for verbal apprehensions are only one element of the complex that is the play), its implicitude in every element of the play makes it quite inappropriately stated as the function of word imagery alone.<sup>10</sup> That would collapse the generic distinction between poetry and drama at its most crucial point: the means of expression. The best that can be said of *rasa* in the context of verbal or poetic expression is that it is an aspect or element thereof. And it is in this way that the other school of criticism has treated it: as an "*alamkāra*" (ornament) of speech, *rasavat* (having a *rasa*).<sup>11</sup> In the dramatic context, the ultimate rationale for the use of a particular poetic verse is the *rasa* of the play. From the point of view of the verse abstracted from the play, the critical concerns of image analysis predominate, and *rasa*, if there at all, is reduced to a subordinate position, for *rasa* is not the end of utterance, as such. It may well, and often does, accompany utterance.<sup>12</sup>

Likewise, taking our reference from Aristotle's *Poetics*, because *rasa* is conceived as an emotional apprehension implicit in every element of the play, and not a change, or modification of emotion (katharsis), it functions as an "end" and is a "result" in quite a different way. It does not "happen" in the course of the play, but is there constant and implicit, subject only to more or better apprehension. The plot structure which is judged suitable to the realization of that awareness is thus also quite different: instead of a concern with peripeties and turning points (denouement), we find a concern for modes of sustenance, revivification through contrast, ultimate reintegration (*phalaprāpti*).<sup>13</sup> But these matters are not germane, except perhaps as illustration, to our present concerns.<sup>14</sup>

The *rasabīja* (seed of *rasa*) sketched by Bharata functions as a critical principle in three important ways: it distinguishes drama (*nāṭya*) from the poetry of which drama is partly composed; it serves as an organic principle in terms of which the integrity of the drama can be understood; and it is also the result of the drama, its end, understood as a state of awareness peculiar to the drama, distinct from "normal" worldly consciousness (*bhāva*).

## RASA IN THE THEORY OF EXPRESSION

In the stage of poetic theory marked by the epochal works of Ānandavardhana (ninth century) and Abhinavagupta (late tenth

and early eleventh centuries),<sup>16</sup> we see a change of emphasis from the differential capacities of genre to their reconciliation in a single theory of expression. Though many aspects of the drama involve nonverbal expression (gestures, scenery, and so on), so too, in an important sense, does verbal expression. The expressive goal, or sense, of verbal art is often not explicitly derived from the literal content of the words and sentences employed. The meticulous analyses of poetic utterance and poetic imagination that were the business of the *alaṃkāra* school, seemed to come to precisely this conclusion. Insofar as utterance can be deemed poetic (the genre distinct), it must involve, as an essential element, some such detour in the usual or normal apprehension process—a *vakrokti* as Bhaṃmaha first called it;<sup>16</sup> a sense grasped by the refined mind as a result of the word heard or read, but not directly by means of it.<sup>17</sup> In the striking conceit of Shakespeare, "O that I were a glove upon that hand—that I might touch that cheek . . .,"<sup>18</sup> it is just the absurdity of the identification of the speaker (Romeo) with an inanimate glove that provokes the hearer to a leap beyond the language in an effort to make sense of that nonsense. How can a man be a glove? Because he wants to be close to Juliet, closer even than the balcony would permit his corporeal presence to be, as close as her own clothing. But this just to "touch her cheek"? Certainly the touch is magnified into an act of love. Her cheek becomes her body concentrated in a point. We are forced to seek a standard of comparison "closeness" that in this case both rationalizes the verbal failure of the initial utterance, and gives rise to further apprehensions, further dimensions of the speaker's intention. It is precisely this success through failure that marks off poetry in the view of the *alaṃkārika*—at least as far as the figures involving "meaning" are concerned (*arthalaṃkāra*). If this is the case, then are we not invited to consider whether *qua* poetry, language is any more distinctive than gesture or character in the drama?

Expression is still the focus of the inquiry, but we seem to be moving towards a view that generalizes art through the fruits of expression (or perhaps more precisely, of nonexpression).

It remained for Ānandavardhana to draw these matters together. The theory does not develop in a vacuum. The critical dimension remains. The interest in elaborating a theory whereby one can unify the arts (or at least drama and strophic poetry) should presuppose some strategic event occurring in the arts them-

selves which at least suggests the opportunity for such a rapprochement. It is not difficult to relate the changes in Sanskrit letters of the post-Gupta and pre-Islamic period to the theoretical reevaluation that we find fullblown in Abhinavagupta and Ānandavardhana. With the collapse of the stable, wealthy, and sophisticated Gupta monarchy, and the "time of troubles" that ensued, Sanskrit drama lost both its audience—never more than the society of sophisticates attracted to the imperial courts and cities—and its means of support, what we presume to have been societies of wealthy literati—and of course, the king himself. Local kingdoms (Harṣa) rose to prominence in various regions, but the cultural stability on which this highly artificial art form depended was destroyed. The later reputation of Bhoja, king of Dhārā, as liberal patron of science and the arts, reads almost like a desperate and forlorn fantasy on how times ought to be—and once were (in the classical age).<sup>19</sup>

Dramas continued to be written, but we presume, were rarely performed—which is to say that drama was deprived of its distinctive characteristics, and reduced to the status of a written art. The writing of drama, lacking the medium in which it comes alive, came increasingly under the dominance of the poetic styles, where ornate metaphor, difficult language, and unplayable (nondramatic) stories dominate.<sup>20</sup> But oddly enough, as drama ceased to be a living art form and was brought more and more into conformity with the rather academic style of the nonsophisticate pundit, its distinctive principle was being used as the basis for explaining the growing rapprochement of genres.

While drama was tending to the status of academic poetry, a privileged vestige of the classical period and distinctly unpopular, poetry came increasingly under the sway of nonliterary needs, chiefly religious, but to some extent didactic (erotic)<sup>21</sup> and epic, the chief impact of which, on poetry as a form, was to reinvest it with a dramatic or narrative function. The religious poetry is a poetry of exploits; of this or that deed of Rāma, or this or that conquest of Kṛṣṇa. It is more dramatic than didactic, for it does not seek so much to teach as to create a sense of worship, a sentiment of oneness with the divine event sufficient to cancel the worshipper's private existence, if only for a moment. Thus its natural adoption of music and song. Such aims cannot be attributed even to the so-called religious poetry of the classical period let alone to the

"epics" of Kālidāsa—where never for a moment does the poem as form recede from the consciousness of the attentive listener.

The question of the genres is thus posed anew, and it is to Ānandavardhana's credit that he not only reevaluated poetics, but redefined its subject matter. The principle of nonliteral intention (common both to dramatic devices and to verbal means) is found to be the third characteristic function of language: *dhvani*, or "suggestion." The subject matter which *dhvani* is suited to express, par excellence, is *rasa*. So poetry, seen as expressor, has won the status not so much of one means of expression among many, but is that means wherein the capacity of language to express is most fully realized. The integrative quality of the drama, since it can never be expressed literally, but only suggested, becomes the proper, or typical, content of that poetic capacity. The genres are downgraded to modal classifications of the same process; at the same time, the nonverbal arts, such as music and painting, are equally considered art, since their distinctiveness is also a matter of externals (sound, color).<sup>22</sup>

The *rasa* as principle is not in question; the dramatic utilization is taken for granted; in order to demonstrate the universality of *rasa* and its character as the subject matter of aesthetic discourse, Ānandavardhana is principally concerned with the dramatic in poetry (*kāvya*); he does not care to demonstrate *rasa*'s existence, but rather he establishes its sufficient characteristic in the verbal function (*dhvani*) that gives it birth, and thus in effect, merges *kāvya* (poetry) and *nāṭya* (drama), which can be distinguished only functionally as expressor and expressed. He claims to be the first to use the word in that sense.

The effort to bring all art forms under a universal principle that was a nondenotative state of awareness had a profound effect on subsequent criticism. Instead of a disciplined search for structural principles, practical aesthetics took on more the character of establishing the *rasa* in terms of specific sets of circumstances. Structural considerations were relegated to the status of adventitious concomitants which could be expounded by list as well as by any other way. The integrity of the work lay in its having a *rasa*, that is, in the successful combination of the circumstantial structures to awaken or otherwise bring to consciousness the *rasa*. But the *rasa*, being a universal, and common to all works, was by definition not strictly dependent on its structural preconditions. A *rasa* is found on the one hand even in the phoneme (*varṇa*); but on the other it is

not of the work at all, but truly of the soul. The structure of art is no more than an excitant; the differences of one art form from another (since they are all brought under the notion of *rasa*) are, as such, less important than the fact that they are so related.<sup>23</sup> For it would seem a corollary of the theory that *rasa* is manipulated in a certain way: it awaits the work of art, as it were. Contrast, for example, the way the emotional effect "katharsis" is expressed by Aristotle as determined by the plot structure. It arises from, and therefore presumes, the essence of the story as development, turning point, denouement. The *rasa*, though it does arise from the story, does so only in the tautological sense that without the story we would have no drama. The *rasa* arises from all the elements, even phonemes, or more accurately, from their combination (*sam-yoga*). Any determinants will work—whether we call their combination poetry, drama, music, dance, or even painting—and work indifferently. The awakening structure, however essential in practical terms, is defined not only as adventitious, but as not existing, in the sense that persistent awareness of the structure as such constitutes an obstacle (*vighna*) to the plenitude which is *rasa*.

The Kāśmīri Śaivite Abhinavagupta, both in his *Locana* on the *Dhvanyāloka* and in his long commentary on the *rasanīṣpattisūtra* (aphorism on the production of *rasa*) of Bharata,<sup>24</sup> investigated the relation between concrete structure (form) and *rasa* awareness. His predecessors espoused theories that established the relationship in determinate or dependent terms. Abhinava sums up these theories (which are otherwise not preserved) as an introduction to his quite radical view that no determinate relation is possible, for the *rasa* is more real and more persistent than any of its so-called causes; it has been there all along, and only requires recognition.

The first theory he mentions is that of Bhaṭṭalollaṭa, who espoused the commonsensical view that the conjunction of structural elements (which he took to imply "with the *sthāyibhāva*," the permanent or principal emotion) was the cause of the *rasa*. Two stages in this cause and effect theory are recognized: first, the preconditions of an emotional experience (stage, characters, poetic phrases) combine to generate the notion of the concrete emotion involved (love, anger, pity, and so on) then this, by combination with the external consequences of the concrete emotion (fainting, stuttering, crying, shouting), through joy, becomes the *rasa* (*sthāyī eva vibhāvānubhāvādibhir upacīto rasaḥ*).<sup>25</sup>

The second theory, Śrīśaṅkuka's, both demonstrates the ināde-

quacy of the first—in Abhinava's eyes—and goes beyond it to a better formulation. The notion of cause-effect is really too powerful to explain the emergence of *rasa* awareness. It presumes a realistic determination, thus ignoring that the play is in an important sense a fiction whereas its effect is real.<sup>26</sup> More importantly, it is subject to constraints of logical necessity which do not hold in the case of fiction, where we often have causes without effect and effects without cause. Śrīśaṅkuka replaces cause and effect with the notion, familiar to us, of *imitation*<sup>27</sup> according to which one may infer the *rasa* from the fictive portrayal on the stage. *Rasa* is, in fact, this inference ("a state of knowing") based on imitation. Though an important advance is made, for *rasa* is now clearly a cognition and not just a result, the doctrine of awareness-as-imitation, so satisfactory to schools of Western aesthetics, is unsound according to Abhinava's teacher Bhaṭṭatauta, because it too is overly realistic and psychologically untenable.

In no true sense can it be said that any of those involved in the drama—the audience, the players, or even the author—are imitating anything. Imitation involves an awareness that one is not that which one imitates. This kind of awareness, according to Tauta (and implicitly approved by Abhinava) is wholly incompatible with the kind of awareness that proceeds from the drama, an awareness characterized by so thorough an immersion in the events of the play that the audience, the players, even the critics, lose all sense of their separate psychological identities. So long as the audience remains on a false level of awareness, the events of the play will seem disjoint from life, a representation of reality, and the awareness of the play remains discrete. So imitation really explains what is unsuccessful in the play rather than what is successful. This paradox can be overcome only by recognizing the elements of the play as already determined in and through the sense of absorption which we recognize in ourselves as transcending concrete experience and self-consciousness. In effect, the events of the play are themselves not understood as specifics (Rāma, the historical king), but are reformulated in a dramatic awareness (what Rāma has in common with me).<sup>28</sup>

Bhaṭṭanāyaka, though earlier in time than Tauta<sup>29</sup> and not in the *guruparamparā* (tradition of teachers) of Abhinavāgupta, seems to have already expressed the positive implications of Tauta's criticism of *rasa* as imitation:<sup>30</sup> that the structural elements

enter into consciousness already generalized, and that the percipient state of the audience, players, and the like, is in effect their common experience (*vāsanā*, the incipient capacity to experience something as something).<sup>31</sup> It is the capacity to love or hate—shared by all men—that is the stuff of drama, not loving or hating this or that person (determined circumstantial love and hate, where time and place are crucial factors in the realization). The *rasa* is a form of general emotional consciousness, similar to the *ātman* itself, and like the *ātman*, rarely experienced as such but only in personal and temporal determination. The play becomes a unique medium for the statement, or clarification, of pure emotional consciousness where the *ātman* is not perceived in and of itself, but is colored by shadings of its most persistent emotional oppositions: love/hate, and so on.<sup>32</sup>

Nāyaka's attempt to reformulate the generative relationship between structure and effect (*rasa*) in terms of his insightful psychology is unacceptable to Abhinava. Nāyaka, unable to explain why the *rasa* comes about in any of the realistic and commonsensical ways of his predecessors, resorts to a novel "function" to explain the appearance of *rasa*. He calls it *bhogīkaraṇa*—"making susceptible to enjoyment"—and still clings to the view that *rasa* is a subordinate element only, as far as poetry is concerned.<sup>33</sup> The circularity of this function hardly needs comment. Unlike the *dhvani*, it has no secure linguistic or psychological basis. It merely restates the problem by verbalizing a difficulty as a solution. The *rasa* is enjoyed, but how does enjoyment come about, even coming out of what is often quite hateful?<sup>34</sup>

Abhinava accepts the negative elements of Tauta's criticism and Nāyaka's positive resumé while trying to give a more convincing rationale (in the dramatic context) for the effective relation of these quite remarkable abstractions.

Instead of positing a new function, which at best restates the problem, Abhinava clarifies the transition from concrete awareness to *rasa* (which he accepts as generalized emotional consciousness) by examining the role of temporal process in this realization. The previously examined theories, realistic or idealistic, have taken for granted the consequence of the *rasa* experience. Indeed, there is a sense in which the play causes the *rasa*. But Abhinava asserts that the truth of the relationship is obscured rather than clarified by considering the matter on this level, for as long as *rasa* is

considered an effect, that is to say, determined in a temporal process, its being will be wholly inexplicable. Rather, we must turn the play inside out: the *rasa* is more real than the play which caused it. We resort again to Aristotelian distinctions: the play is not a cause, in the sense of an efficient cause, but a precondition, whose relationship to the end—the *rasa*—is merely hypothetical. The play is a cause then only in the sense of the material cause. It displays the necessity of any potential in relation to the actual that is its goal and realization. What happens in the theater is that the play permits the spectator to clarify the implicitude of the emotional propensities which he brought to the theater with him and which he will take away again. These emotional dispositions are the very ground of his sentimental or affective life. They are what make it possible to feel a specific emotion in a specific context or situation, and even to experience the play itself. In this sense the play does not seem to differ radically from the world we live in. The peculiar character of art resides only in the manner of determination; from this derives the uniqueness and the clarifying strength of the play.

In mundane experience, emotional propensities achieve awareness only in terms of, and in subservience to, independently real and determinate circumstance. Here one *can* talk about the circumstances as efficient causes of the experience that is formed: the experience is impossible without such other determination (one cannot love just "a woman," but must love a specific woman). In the supramundane mode of awareness represented by the drama, the awareness is not caused in this sense, but is triggered by wholly fictive portrayals in such a way that the propensity to experience is known as different and incommensurate with the apparent visual, auditory, and emotional content it has. But it is just this separation of the capacity to experience from its content, that is *rasa*. Thus the uniquely pleasurable character of aesthetic experience is explained as the nature of the *rasa* itself. The *rasa* is a form of knowing—experience abstracted from a determinate content. As Aristotle observes, learning is an activity most suited to the soul, and is pleasurable even when it is about painful things. Thus, in the context of the play, despair is experienced apart from any specific, personal despair, and this in itself is probably delightful, for the knowledge itself frees us from its consequences.

It is given to the play—to art, then—to demonstrate something



about ourselves that is otherwise unknown: our capacity to feel. Art that has this form, that aims this high, has no other, no extrinsic, purpose. It cannot be social comment, nor can it be rhetorically persuasive; it really cannot be understood as biographical, or "relevant." Put in this way, we can see something of the problem that the *rasa* presents to the modern critic. How can such an essentially introspective principle have become the only significant interpretive category for the artistic production of a civilization? Abhinava suggests the dimensions of this conundrum more than he provides an answer in his celebrated comparison of *rasa* awareness to the cognition of Brahman in the experience of final release (*mokṣa*).<sup>35</sup> No doubt the seriousness of art is well served by this comparison. Only in art, it would appear, is there a prefiguring of the ultimate experience, transient it is true, and still colored by the emotional ties we have to concrete life, but an experience of the same genus: a truly Kantian experience of the soul as precondition of concrete experience. The dominance of the *mokṣa* ideal in all forms of religious speculation and devotion would reinforce the importance of art itself and would probably (this is the solution to the critical dilemma) preselect artistic forms which served these ideals and realized these implicit principles of experience. The rest of art is a waste of time, given the seriousness of the quest for being in consciousness. More than the notion of an amalgamation of the genres of drama and poetry, this constitutes a true dramatization of literature: a dramatization of the soul's religious quest.

This seems a highly rationalized view of the dramatic experience; but to assert that the drama is a form of consciousness—however generalized—is to distinguish it, in Indian terms, from modes of knowing that are reflective. Unlike the force of similar Western distinctions, which emphasize the scientific or truth value of reflective knowledge, here reflective knowledge is not superior to other forms of knowledge.

The criticism of such works of art proceeds from a set of principles quite different from what the Aristotelian tradition would consider proper. Instead, the Indian poet is seen as operating in a genre which, like philosophy, takes its principles from nature—the emotions—and aims at the same kind of truth: an apprehension of reality in and of itself, not determined in concrete content. The art form, like philosophical discipline, is not a product but an act, and its peculiar shape is a function of the activity itself. In the essential

activity of the drama the philosophical discipline is present, shared by audience, poet, player and critic; via which capacity to act all are called *sahṛdaya*, "having heart in common."<sup>36</sup> In the drama, it is through words, gestures, and acts conceived as designating something outside themselves (as having *śakti*, or powers of reference); in the case of philosophical discipline, it is by the things themselves, so designated. Philosophy is more real, but its reality is relative in that it operates with things (the realities of conditioned existence)<sup>37</sup> directly, and not through the medium of designation, symbolic or otherwise. The reality aimed at is the same in both cases (in a sense, the realities through which the two disciplines operate are also the same) with this difference; in one case they are understood via symbolism, in the other perceived. Hence the persistent concern shown in the Indian poetic tradition with words more as links with the world about than as counter-real nominals or as contentless forms capable of their own beauty.

The view that *rasa* is the proper subject matter of poetry—and in effect of all art—which we owe to Ānandavardhana, and its characterization in epistemological and synthetic terms, which we owe to Abhinava, still influence contemporary Indians confronting their cultural heritage. The task before us in the remainder of this paper is to trace the critical dimension of the postclassical *rasa* doctrine, attempting to understand both its persistent character (the achievement of Abhinavagupta) and its problems in modern Indian speculation on literature.

### THE RELIGIOSITY OF RASA

If Abhinava's effort to characterize the seriousness and unity of art can be seen as posing a problem for religious experience in relation to art (or artistic experience), *rasa* then emerges as the key to a series of existential reasonings which are truly religious rather than analogically religious. In the period of vigorous Bengali Vaiṣṇavism (fifteenth to sixteenth centuries), we find a religion that takes its entire theological apparatus from the categories of the *rasa* aesthetics.

In medieval Bengal, the critic ceases to be a sophisticate, and instead becomes the teacher of multitudes: a guide in the most important business of life—salvation. Of course, these atypical developments presume a religion of a certain type, one fully manifest in

the Indian middle ages, wherein the immediacy of god was prized to the extent that only an emotional relationship with him was judged suitable, or even possible. For it is in the emotions only that the great majority of mankind can experience immediate being; it is their only way to god, a way called *bhakti* from the *Gītā* onward. Once the emotions are seen as the exclusive, or only suitable approach, to the divine, worship becomes the experience of the god in possession, and is most akin to human love. And where do we find the sentiment of love most clearly expounded and related to its psychic limits? In aesthetics, for love is the *rasa* par excellence. If such a system of religious devotionism requires a theology, it will find it only in an aesthetic; and an aesthetic was most readily available.

It is in the *Ujjvalanīlamani*<sup>28</sup> of Rūpagosvāmin that the aesthetic framework is used most clearly to explicate the religious experience of transport into Kṛṣṇa's presence. The *Ujjvalanīlamani* looks to the secular life insofar as aesthetics is a serious celebration of everyday feelings and personal sentiments. What we find is almost a literal return to the form of Bharata's original dramatic criticism. Beginning with a meticulous distinction of character types, the *rasa* formerly known as *śṛṅgāra* is analyzed in terms of its appropriate *anubhāva* and *vibhāva*; it is then designated *bhaktīrasarāj*, *mādhurya*, or *madhurarasa* ("king of devotional *rasa*"; "sweetness"; the "sweet *rasa*"). Involved are two basic issues: a reevaluation of the notion of *rasa* so as to include all sentiment under the aegis of love (which was only one of eight *rasa* in the original compendium); and a restriction of *rasa*'s proper subject matter to the single event of Kṛṣṇa's life and loves. The divine play becomes the only play, and Kṛṣṇa the only hero (*nāyaka*).

The idea of generalizing *rasa* has been implicit in the notion since the beginning. In following Bhaṭṭanāyaka's insight, that the method of *rasa* is generalization in concrete experience, not apart from it, there is a tautological sense in which all *rasas* are one. Insofar as *rasa* is considered as a state of mind or consciousness, it exists primarily as a genus that concrete content has ceased to determine. Rūpagosvāmin and his nephew Jīvagosvāmin are more traditional (but also more revolutionary than Abhinava) in proposing that in one *rasa* alone all other *rasa* find their basis and support; others derive their life from *śṛṅgāra*, their being.<sup>29</sup>

In speaking of Kṛṣṇa as the only hero, and of *bhakti* as the only

*rasa*,<sup>40</sup> we establish literature in the area of archetypes, rather than in the area of concrete works and experience. But in saying that literature is archetypal, we are also saying that it is only potential. Thus the poet becomes truly a creator, not only a manipulator of symbols within the general limitations of a certain kind of target experience, but also the creator of the experience as actual. Only the *bhakta*—the one who experiences—can write poetry. The poet becomes important for the first time in the history of Indian letters, and it seems no accident that in the Vaiṣṇava poetry we have for the first time a signed poetry. The poet's signature validates the experience that the poem realizes. The thematic limitations of this style of literature concern not so much the content of the poetry—though it does seem to be limited to Kṛṣṇa's escapades—rather, since all possible experiences (other *rasas*) are subordinate aspects of the culminating experience, the limitation is one of manner and organization. In this way is explained the poet's persistent quest to identify himself with one of the archetypal characters of the Kṛṣṇa legend, for in experience of Kṛṣṇa, all experience is possible.

As there is but one *rasa*, so there is but one play—that of Kṛṣṇa in the eternal forests of Vṛndāvana. In one sense, this appears merely a limitation of subject matter which does not affect the interpretation of *rasa* or the explanation of its emergence. But in making all literature into one story, which thus becomes the archetype of all literature, the role of the audience or the experience of *rasa* is fundamentally modified. The elements of the dramatic situation define the sense in which an emotion (*bhāva*) is concretely realized and presented to an audience. Understanding Kṛṣṇa as the essential lover, and the love not different from his own, the spectator experiences *bhāva* as *rasa*, that is, experiences an emotion from which temporal, spatial, and personal determinants have been removed or abstracted. He experiences the possibility of experience, and this is bliss.

In making Kṛṣṇa the only hero, a problem ensues at the crux of the *rasa* experience, for it cannot be said of the *bhakta*'s or worshiper's *rasa* that it is nondetermined. For the consciousness of Kṛṣṇa becomes, if anything, even more vivid in the devotee's ecstasy. The *rasa*, then, is not mere contemplation, but an ultimate awareness of Kṛṣṇa as the condition of being, in whom, in one sense, all men are the same. In another, the one who experiences is radically different from the characters and players of the drama.

In the Vaiṣṇava *rasa*, because there is only one story possible, it is the business of the spectator not only to feel and experience, but to realize in himself the elements of the story. This *rasa* differs from Abhinava's then, in the seemingly paradoxical contention that *rasa* is not whole as long as *rasa* remains a passive state: *rasa* demands realization, and the devotee becomes actor. The worshiper reenacts the consequences of his experience in the ritual as play, and as actor brings the *rasa* back into the world, paradoxically, by investing all concrete events with the significance of the Kṛṣṇa play.

As the devotee realizes the *rasa*, we find that his experience is described through the technical terminology of the early *Nāṭyaśāstra*: "Stupor and sweat, tears and trembling and *pulaka* [tingling of the flesh] and pallor were on the faces of both, and a murmuring of the syllables of Kṛṣṇa's name was heard."<sup>41</sup> These are the *sāttvika bhāva*, or involuntary manifestations of emotion, which in the early theory were seen as part of the arsenal of expressive devices used by the actors to communicate the being of the otherwise unknowable emotions. Now the worshipers seize upon the same test of the reality of their emotional experience, but invert the terms completely. Instead of establishing the difference between the play and the world, the expression of involuntary emotions now serves as the standard for the abolition of the distinction. We proceed in the original theory from a fiction to a genuine experience (*rasa*); here in reversal, from the genuine experience to a new, or rediscovered world. The actor then becomes an everyman insofar as this discovery is concerned. Reemphasis on the actor, as opposed to the audience, constitutes the chief operational innovation of the Vaiṣṇava *rasa* theory. Anyone can know god but only that actor can bring him here.

## RASA IN MODERN INDIAN CRITICISM

The transition to the last section of this paper is not as abrupt as might appear at first glance, for in considering whether *rasa* has a place in modern Indian criticism we are really asking whether this notion so long dominating the history of Indian aesthetics can be redefined so as to remain operational in a secular and Westernizing context. Today "having a *rasa* as organizing principle" is increasingly being taken as "what is essentially Indian" about the work in

question. No one has proposed *rasa* to explain a non-Indian work of art—though we don't immediately see why they couldn't.<sup>42</sup>

There are several interrelated issues in such a problem. (1) We may find that *rasa* is useful in explaining certain bizarre features of modern literary expression, particularly those that seem "Indian." (2) We may do this without implying that the *rasa* constitutes an expressive goal, fully articulated or not, on the part of the authors. (3) If we claim the latter to be the case, it behooves us to show by what vehicle the classical/medieval notion is made known and available to modern writers. (4) If we show that there is a plausible vehicle, then we can ask whether the *rasa* is a principle that may be appealed to in other cultural contexts. The latter is the comparative issue par excellence: for identifying the *rasa* as relative or universal is the business of comparative aesthetics, as it deals with India. Let us examine each of these issues in turn.

(1) Can classical narrative genres, whose views of plot and characterization are deeply impressed (though rarely explicitly) with elements of the *rasa* theory, be utilized perspicuously in analyzing a borrowed modern literary form—the novel?<sup>43</sup> The kind of situation in which referral to the *rasa* may help to heighten critical awareness is normally that defined by the problem of borrowed forms. If the novel, the short story, the revived drama, to some extent the aberrant poetic styles that have taken root in the soil of Bengal and now elsewhere in India, are formally definable as extensions of familiar Western genres, then it seems appropriate to judge their artistic success likewise in terms of Western understandings of these genres. On the face of it, Indians have no theory from which to approach these new types of literary work. At best, India supplies a content and a material which is then reworked according to notions of appropriateness that seem little more than corollaries of the borrowed forms themselves. Even when the work in question involves an Indian vernacular, the language issue is also reduced to questions of content, or as it is usually put, "to what extent have the Indian materials been successfully integrated into the established forms?"

The starkly contrastive terms in which questions of borrowing and subsequent influence are put is the point at which the adequacy of the theories as modes of criticism must be examined. The view seems to be that influence is uni-directional, that form molds content, and that we have explained a modern Indian work when

we have established whether or not the content is successfully adapted to the form. To oppose two cultures, two literatures, as *form* and *content*, is, it would seem, simply to mistake perfectly valid analytical categories for historical realities. Form is, in Aristotle's terms, the making explicit, or the coming to maturity, of the potential of a thing (its matter); the equation of form with that which is borrowed, as something alien to the material (which may be the case historically), only prejudices the critic to condemn the work of art as derivative, unimaginative, and stylized—by definition.<sup>44</sup> On the one hand, we have a question of fact: "Can forms be borrowed?" and on the other, a question of judgment: "Which approach permits us to appreciate the fully realized potentiality of the Indian work?" There is clearly a need to seek a critical posture that is not *ex hypothesi* condemned to fail its subject matter.

The *rasa* may be introduced into such a discussion as a test of what is genuine—as opposed to what is borrowed—in an Indian work, not as an additional material to be integrated, but as an aspect of form itself, an alternative to the consideration of form as alien. *Rasa* would thus serve as an important first level corrective on two counts: the theory would no longer be condescending, and the work could also aspire to integrity—form and matter would not be defined as separate and conflicting. A new dimension of judgment is made possible by looking at the work's form from an identifiably Indian point of view.

But another aspect of the question presents itself at this point. If a work, such as R. K. Narayan's *Man Eater*, is better understood in terms of Indian categories of appreciation, does it not follow that *rasa* (or whatever term this "Indianness" adopts) is more than just an alternative formal approach complementing that of the alien genres? If the work is not only better understood, but closer to its own ideal and therefore absolutely better, is *rasa* not in fact functioning as an integrative principle, through which forms of whatever provenience are adapted to an Indian ideal? If there is a sense of artistic integrity that escapes us unless we examine the work through the *rasa*, then we have established the *rasa* not only as a critical possibility, but as a necessity and a goal implicit in the work itself. We are not then dealing with a novel at all, but with an extension of the classical narrative story. The notion of *rasa* can then be used as a locus for identifying forms of expressive utterance that more adeptly characterize the force of certain modern

Indian works that appear *prima facie* to be based on borrowed forms.

(2) To what extent can it be asserted today, as certainly was the case for a millennium previously, that *rasa* constitutes an explicit goal of expression? We have suggested that *rasa* may be considered a principle of understanding, may be in effect, implicit in the work. Is it also, as it was for many classical writers and for the Vaiṣṇavas of Bengal, the whole content and true soul of art?

Here we appear to be able to make a distinction. In the nonverbal arts, such as music, dance, and painting, whose cultural continuity is evident, the modern understanding still focuses on a suggestion of a mood, a state of feeling—*rasa*. The literary arts, on the other hand, few of which are linked by explicit traditions to the classical past, are judged to take their ends from borrowed forms; to be realistic social criticism, personal statement of involvement or experience, or exhortatory revivalism of values.

The film is a compound art form,<sup>45</sup> very much resembling the drama in its constituents—music, dance, song, language. In fact it is more complex, for the art of the painter or sculptor is in a sense superadded in the selection and determination of sequence, in the ability to multiply points of view, and in the abrogation of distance in the actual witnessing of the film. The art form is in one sense the most exotic of those imported into India from the West, depending on a wholly unprecedented technology and on forms of mass publicity that are characteristic of the modern age. Still it is instructive to consider what aesthetic principles have informed the film in India, for if we can show that standards of criticism implying *rasa* also dominate here, there can be little doubt as to the survival of *rasa* as a principle of aesthetic organization.

The film, from the Indian point of view, is a natural for the exploitation and illustration of *rasa*. It serves as a modern day counterpart to the kind of problem that first provoked speculation on the *rasa*: unity of impact and form in the composite dramatic genre. Variety and typicality are the essence of film, as they were of the classical drama; poetic language and generalized characterizations serve the function of placing the film apart from life, as a means of making it into something of truly universal concern to its audience.

Beginning with the commonplace observation that Indian films are of three types, mythologicals, socials, and those of Satyajit Ray,



we note that most Western-based critical evaluations have tended to view all of them as derivative from, and, except for Ray's films, notably inferior to, recognizable forms that have developed in the West. Chiefly, the socials are seen as an Indian version of social realism concerned with contemporary, usually caste or communal, problems. The mythologicals, as escapist musical-comedy fare, directly exploit the rich puranic mythology still so vivid to the Indian masses. Ray, whose films don't seem to respond to any Indian need at all, is terribly well received in the West because his films conform recognizably to our notions of a direct personal statement of the human condition.

The mythologicals represent a rebirth of the drama in quasi-classical terms, recast through the powerful medium of *bhakti*. It is indeed as though the theological *rasa* of the medieval Bengali Vaiṣṇavas had again been given an artistic form: for *bhakti* is indeed the *rasarāṭ* of the mythological film. The immense popularity of these films attests to the reality of aesthetic forms which are Indian, and resemble those of the classical period as far as the basics of action and character, generalization and integration are concerned. Unlike our own classical ideal, which postulates a fruitful relation of character and action, the Indian theory, in order to realize a *rasa*, radically separates character and action, such that character does not change and action is conceived as external circumstance.<sup>46</sup>

The socially relevant films, organized according to the same aesthetic principles, draw their themes from contemporary life and issues. In the classical period of Sanskrit drama, too, we find topical works. But in the social film elements are at work which can be explained, it seems, only as a restatement of *rasa* through a contemporary vehicle. Where the emotional absorption (*bhakti*) of the audience is primary, we have mythologicals; where it is subservient to other ends, factual, or issue-oriented topics, we have the social. But *rasa* remains the principle of organization so long as the audience's consciousness of the characters does not overpower the message. And indeed, this seems to be the chief distinction, as well as the powerful attraction, of the social, for it appears to crystallize, as no other medium, the problem of contemporary nationhood—what it means to be Indian in a secular state with an ineluctable nonsecular tradition. Whatever the *rasa* may be, hate or love, it is not expressed for its own sake, but as an essential element

in a message about modern life, about people in whom all Indians, however humble, recognize national problems and issues—caste or creed, poverty and wealth.<sup>47</sup>

Without a notion such as *rasa*, we don't understand either the form of the social, and its essential difference with respect to the mythological, or the reason for the immense success of both. We are forced to appeal to the extrinsic characterization that a movie is popular because it is about well-known things, and ultimately to the notion of bad taste, that the masses go to the movies to escape from the realities of everyday life. To the contrary, a new sense of social and political awareness is in process of formation in the audience.

Satyajit Ray's films, deeply impressed with a sense of individual involvement and individual fate, are difficult to account for in classical terms. Instead of verbal, phonic, and other external poetic devices predominating—to the virtual exclusion of the internal or meaning-oriented *rasa*—other externals predominate; namely lost and harried individuals, subject to all the chances and circumstances of reality, and not portrayed in their essential sameness, which is after all, optimistic and permanent. Such films are therefore, in a technical sense, "tasteless," and not only unpopular, but uninteresting, except to those Indians who have imbibed something of a Western taste in these matters.

Films, along with music and the dance revival, constitute the one powerful reaffirmation of classical culture<sup>48</sup> on the rather puny modern scene of conscious ecumenism and imitative borrowing.

(3) Can we identify a vehicle that will bring the *rasa* from the seventeenth century to our own day? If the *rasa* can be discerned as an organizing principle, and to that extent is a conscious principle of composition and of appreciation, can we also account for it as a living aspect of Indian intellectuality?

The answer is to be sought in the relation between *rasa* and character, both literary and psychological. The *rasa* has always been determined as a way of experiencing. Therefore, it would not seem difficult to postulate its perpetuation as a habit—a form of perception that structures reality and life. Indeed, the classical psychology proposes such a vehicle to account for the transmigrating soul: *vāsana*. This disposition or propensity to experience, brought slightly up to date, would also serve to characterize the

*rasa* and account for its psychological potentiality, as well as its crystallization in certain works of contemporary fiction. Insofar as Indian fine arts, especially music, and the evident devotionism of most contemporary spirituality,<sup>40</sup> determine sensibility in this way, and are understood as provoking an experience through material symbols that have no direct capacity to produce the experience, but rather suggest it—for it is already there in the soul, latent—it is still possible to do the same thing by using as materials literary and intellectually mediate symbols, meaning, and words. So long as indirection remains the standard of expression, it is consistent with any material whatever.

An aesthetic habit demands that the work have a specific meaning or determine our sensibility in accordance with expectations that have ceased to have vivid alternatives. But *rasa* has always been understood as a predisposition to experience, not the experience itself; generalized modes of experience that provide the basic contrasts in all possible experiences. Insofar as this predisposition can itself be experienced, we “know” *rasa*; but in our current line of thought, we have to ask in what sense we can know a habit, a psychological potentiality, that is *rasa* in some recognizably contemporary sense. It may be that the consciousness, “I am an Indian,” the quality of heroism stated more successfully in social films than through the medium of caste-politics or government policy, is just that potentiality which constitutes the subjective determination of the contemporary *rasa*.

Political or national consciousness is thought to be a basic ingredient of modern life; that it might evolve in India in part through aesthetic models should not surprise us. Aesthetics in India seems to be an equivalent of Western psychology. In combination with ethics, it can be exploited much as we exploit the latter. In terms of historical variables relevant to the twentieth century, a national consciousness, “Indianness,” appears to be a kind of response to awareness of other worlds; civilization becomes an object of consciousness the moment it is perceived historically that value systems are total, self-validating, and yet in some sense, alternative.

(4) Is there a sense in which the *rasa* theory constitutes a valid alternative in Western discourse? If the *rasa*, as a form of consciousness, characterizes something unique about Indian experience, then it would not appear to have the quality of universal application without distortion, or without destroying a sense of the

validity of "Indianness." This question has many relevant corollaries: What conditions must be met if a non-Indian is to appreciate an Indian art object? Are these the same or different conditions from those which must be met by an unsophisticated Indian? Is it even possible to formulate an aesthetic to encompass such temporal and cultural variables? Or does each aesthetic—even the protean *rasa* doctrine—invariably presume an ethnocentricity that forces an either/or choice and ultimately becomes Forster's echo in the caves of Marabār?

The history of the *rasa* theory would seem to provide a good basis from which to examine these issues. It is a doctrine at once uniform and yet internally differentiated over an immense number of problem-variables: drama, poetry, devotion, and even politics. The degree of universality it has achieved in the Indian cultural consciousness forces us to restate the cultural question even more generally: Is there anything in the Indian *rasa* doctrines themselves that can be identified as universal or common, and therefore as constitutive?

In each of the four stages through which we have traced the evolution of the Indian *rasa*, certain common elements can be discerned—elements whose reevaluation in fact accounts for the changes and new foci of *rasa* as a principle. The *rasa* does not seem to diverge from this minimalist characterization at any time; it is a unity, immediate, an affect, and a whole.

(a) The *rasa* is a sense of unity in a disparate matter and, therefore, a test of coherence and integration. It is further unique to its matter and nowhere else realizable. But, unlike Aristotle's unities, the unity is not in the matter but in us; therefore, the matter is ultimately circumstance, indifference.

(b) The *rasa* is an immediate awareness. It is not developed through excogitation, though an object in some sense must be delivered to us as immediate. Normal or real objects are subject to interpretation, and thus not grasped immediately. It is the function of poetry and art to be able to strip objects of their thoughtful or reasonable mediacy, and present them as general properties of the experiencing self and hence, immediate.

(c) The *rasa* is always an affect, never an effect or a consequence. It is determined as a response, therefore emotional, to circumstance, never as an alteration of circumstance. But the *rasa* is not a real affect, like fear or love, for the individual and personal

dimension of emotion is absent. It is still an evaluation of circumstances, but the evaluative function is freed from determination by circumstances, and appears to determine them (fiction). The basic paradox of the *rasa* theory is here, for how can an affect exist for itself? How can it be said to determine objects (as a play) and yet not be involved in a cause-effect relationship? The answer, insofar as there is one, seems to lie in the realization that the reactive evaluation of circumstance, when freed from circumstances (or fictionalized), is the implicit precondition of the soul to experience, which can never itself be experienced because the implicit becomes explicit only through development in terms of external conditions. Yet it can achieve an explicitude of an introverted sort through objects whose individual and "real" capacities have been resolutely excised.

(d) The *rasa* is a whole. It is an awareness from which nothing is excluded, that is, which reevaluates its entire content and is different only from states of partial awareness, such as those which characterize "normal" life and consciousness. It is partial in the sense that consciousness is inescapably determined as "mine," or "his," or "now," and there seems to be the situation in which it appears that consciousness itself is multiple. The reintegration of consciousness is perhaps the main function of art.

In these terms, now quite general, there is little that can be said to be necessarily "Indian" about *rasa*; it just happens that this view of art has had a rather more full development in India than in the West. Our naive expectations of art—from which our sophisticated theories rarely diverge—lead us to determine art in the area of personal and individual creativity, emphasizing just those aspects of the experiential continuum that are judged to be obstacles to appreciation in the Indian modes. For us in the West, art is a thing marked with individuality—the author as exceptional life, the form as unique, the social consequence as decisive. Our criticism seeks to demonstrate uniqueness or its absence; our aesthetics seek to buttress such criticism. In this very general sense, the *rasa* seems to encaption a way of experiencing that devalues concreteness and individuation.

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that there is anything necessary in this contrast of Indian and Western. Each seems rather a case of emphasis and coherent loci of possibilities. Strains of criticism suggesting a *rasa*-like orientation are indeed present in

many Western theories of art; but these do not seem to have struck the deep tones within our recent cultural experience that would assign to them the overwhelming explanatory validity that the *rasa* has in the Indian experience.

As a way of organizing the work of art in terms of a psychologically real condition, the *rasa* theory bears comparison with Western aesthetics whose principles are equally taken from the subject rather than the object. A more popular version of "emotionalism," or art as sympathetic awareness, such as that of Leo Tolstoy, differs quite strikingly from the Indian views in considering emotion the same in its real and artistic modes. For Tolstoy art is simply the communication of emotion "consciously, and by means of certain external signs."<sup>50</sup> But *rasa* cannot be understood unless it is, as experience, distinguished from emotion (*bhāva*). Theories of empathy or beauty by projection might form an interesting basis for approaching the religious, or Vaiṣṇava, version of *rasa*, in that aesthesis in both doctrines is an activity that involves a radical reevaluation of the object, of objectivity itself. "... The question about the object of esthetic enjoyment may be answered in a two-fold manner. On the one hand it can be said: Esthetic pleasure has no object at all. The esthetic enjoyment is not enjoyment of an object but enjoyment of a self. ... On the other hand ... in esthetic enjoyment this sense of value is objectified."<sup>51</sup>

This standpoint, though well accounting for the distinction *alaukika-laukika* (aesthesis-perception), would be difficult to square with Abhinavagupta's emphasis on the contemplative: a permanency that neither causes nor is caused, but is merely revealed by the object. Ortega y Gasset's effort to "dehumanize" art strikingly parallels Abhinavagupta's position in some details, as in the radical distinction between life as lived and life as viewed artistically. But his efforts to relate art both to society (a common man views art as life, whereas the *sahṛdaya*, the aristocrat, is able to make the distinction) and to critical history (more recent art, being less pictorial is therefore better), appear to be irrelevant digressions as well as reimportation of "real" categories into the determination of aesthetic experience. The closest approximation in Western aesthetic theory to *rasa*, at least to Abhinava's *rasa*, is to be found in the notion of synaesthesia, associated with the English philosophers Charles Kay Ogden and Ivor A. Richards, but prefigured by Hugo Münsterberg. They strike a balance between "em-

pathy" and "distance" (both of which are involved in the *rasa*) by emphasizing the artistic emotion as a unifying experience. "The unity of a work of art is the counterpart of a unity within the experience of the beholder."<sup>52</sup> A quite remarkable statement of Ethel Puffer, who was a student of Münsterberg, deserves extensive citation:

I defined the beautiful object as possessing those qualities which bring the personality into a state of unity and self-completeness. How those qualities appeared in the Object, how they brought about that state in the person, lay for me within the realm of psychology, and as such offered no problems in any way unique, or insoluble. We need to know only how to translate unity and self-completeness into psychological terms. [Quoting herself.] "The psychophysical organism is in a state of virtual congealment or emptiness, as in a trance of ecstasy; or when it is in a state of repose, without tendency to chance. Secondly, the organism is self-complete when it is at the highest possible point of tone of functional efficiency, of enhanced life." The only possible combination of these contradictory concepts, opposing states, is in the condition of equilibrium. . . . I found in this concept of equilibrium, of excursion from the center, *and return*, a principle for explanation of the details of the elements of picture, poem, drama, symphony, which, each in its own way, leads us on an excursion of experience and brings us back, stimulated to unity and self-completeness.<sup>53</sup>

This might seem almost a translation of Abhinava's *rasnīṣpattisūtra*. Further:

Not only . . . are we held in equilibrium in the object of attention; we cannot connect with it our self-background, for the will cannot act on the object of esthetic feeling. . . .

The loss of the sense of personality is an integral part of the esthetic experience; and we have seen how it is a necessary psychological effect of the unity of the object.<sup>54</sup>

T. S. Eliot, who at times also speaks with a most "un-Western" voice, says that poetry is such as to "make us from time to time a little more aware of the deeper unnamed feelings which form the substratum of our being, to which we rarely penetrate, for our lives are mostly a constant evasion of ourselves, and an evasion of the visible and sensual world."<sup>55</sup> And a line that recalls the Sanskrit of Abhinava: "the end of the enjoyment of poetry is a pure

contemplation from which all the accidents of personal emotion are removed.”<sup>56</sup> Elsewhere Eliot speaks movingly of his three years of Sanskrit study at Harvard and recommends the study of Indian civilization as the best available corrective to the Western habit of concluding that we have spoken both the first and the final word on all subjects of interest to mankind.<sup>57</sup>

Eliot’s doctrine of the “objective correlative” may have more than accidental overtones of similarity with the views which we have claimed constitute the mainstream of Indian thinking. In Eliot, we witness the continuation of a line of Western thinking that has formulated its expression not in isolation, but in response to, or in direct cognizance of, an Indian mode of thought. It is a mode of thinking that, by involving a comparative dimension, resists comparative analysis. Perhaps, instead of asking whether there are aspects of the *rasa* aesthetics that are universal, we need look only to the increasing sense of interrelationship and interdependence that is slowly abolishing the integrity of “civilization” itself, the inviolable and self-generating “other” totality. If we find that recent Western aesthetics has been imbalanced by overriding cultural and ethical theses that derive from the industrial revolution, European expansion, and the need for authentic individualities—democratic and egalitarian—perhaps the coming centuries, faced with the stark alternative of reestablishing a self-perpetuating world order, or no order at all, will turn rather to the treasury of aesthetic themes that emphasizes coherence, transcendence, and peace.

## Notes

1. For example, see A. B. Keith, *History of Sanskrit Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928), pp. 344–351; S. K. De, *Sanskrit Poetics as a Study of Aesthetics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), especially chap. 5; S. K. De, *History of Sanskrit Poetics* (Calcutta: K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1960), vol. 1, pp. 28 ff.
2. But while Sanskrit drama declines as a form, its proper aesthetic in effect becomes the principle of all art; art is “dramatized” while drama loses its culturally distinctive character. Cf. De, *History of Sanskrit Poetics*, vol. 2, p. 18 (footnotes); and Edwin Gerow, “Introduction,” *A Glossary of Indian Figures of Speech* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), pp. 70 ff.
3. De, *History of Sanskrit Poetics*, vol. 2, p. 18.



4. Gerow, "Introduction," *Glossary*.
5. De, *History of Sanskrit Poetics*, vol. 2, p. 18. Cf. De, *Some Problems of Sanskrit Poetics* (Calcutta: K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1960), pp. 47, 77; Gerow, *Glossary*, pp. 9–13.
6. Renou, *L'Inde Classique*, para. 1580 (the Gaekwad edition has only thirty-seven chapters).
7. Bharata, *Nāṭyaśāstra*, ed. M. R. Kavi, 2nd ed., vol. 1, Gaekwad Oriental Series (Baroda, 1956), pp. 287 ff. Hence the importance of the cooking analogy. In the cooking process, discrete unrelated ingredients are composed into a whole, conveying a single taste.
8. As reflected in the derivation of *bhāva*, "concrete emotion": "*evam bhāva bhāvayanti rasān*." Ibid., p. 293 (6.36).
9. The argument seems to be understood by Abhinava as a *pūrvapakṣa*: "*atra codyavādt svāsayam unmtlayati*." Ibid.
10. For Aristotle, the "tragic" emotion is also possible in certain kinds of epic poetry. Drama and epic are distinguished according to their means. *Poetics* 9.144b9; 12.1462b12.
11. Gerow, *Glossary*, p. 239; De, *Problems of Sanskrit Poetics*, pp. 184 ff.
12. Gerow, *Glossary*, p. 78.
13. S. Lévi, *Le Théâtre Indien* (Paris: Emile Bouillon, 1890), pp. 33–34; see also "Indian Poetics," in *The Literature of India: An Introduction*, eds. Edward C. Dimock, et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).
14. See my article, "Plot-formation in the *Śākuntala*," to be published in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*.
15. All dates follow S. K. De, *History of Sanskrit Poetics*, vol. 1, pp. 101–102.
16. Bhāmāna, *Kāvyaśāstra* (editio princeps as Appendix 8 to Bombay Sanskrit and Prakrit Series, vol. 65), 1.30. On the term "*vakrokti*," see De, introduction to his edition of the *Vakroktijvāla*, pp. xv–xxv.
17. That is, by *abhidhā*.
18. *Romeo and Juliet*, 2.2.24–25.
19. Ballāla, *Bhojaprabandha*, trans. Louis Gray (American Oriental Series).
20. Those forms of the drama that have survived until today are not in our terms dramatic at all, having lost their spoken form (Bhāratanaṭya, Kathakali). The case of Kūṭiyāṭṭam is wholly peculiar.
21. The medieval "century" (*śataka*) style.
22. It is also instructive that the genre collapse of strophic poetry and drama can be seen as taking place through the medium of music; the culturally creative forms of both drama and poetry are increasingly brought under the constraints of musical form.
23. As in many other respects, the *Daśarūpaka* remains most faithful to Bharata, beginning as it does with an elaborate rehearsal of the sixty-four *saṇḍhyāṅga* (1.25–54).
24. Gaekwad edition, vol. 1, pp. 272–287; trans. by R. Gnoli as "The Aesthetic Experience According to Abhinavagupta," (Serie Orientale Roma, vol. 11).
25. Ibid., p. 272.
26. A point made by Gorgias and ridiculed by Socrates. *Gorgias* S456–457.
27. Clearly an opinion that in India also enjoyed much authority: cf. *Daśarūpaka* 1.7: "*avasthānuṅktir nāṭyam; rūpam dṛsyatayā ucyate / rūpakam tatsamāropāt* . . ." A play is called *rūpaka* in the generic sense because one situation (the "fiction") is imposed on another (the players): a "metaphorical identification" that closely parallels the term's use in the *alaṃkāraśāstra*. Cf. Gerow, *Glossary*, p. 239 ff.

28. To what extent this is true of the actor as well as the audience is debatable; the actor's technical expertise seems to put him on a different level as far as "absorption" is concerned. So Abhinava, who asserts that he does not "experience" *rasa*. Still the actor cannot seriously be said to be imitating Rāma, for the cognition, "I am a Rāma," would be a ludicrous addition to his otherwise acute awareness.
29. De, *History of Sanskrit Poetics*, vol. 1. p. 41, 111-112.
30. *Nāṭyaśāstra*, pp. 276-277.
31. Though Nāyaka claims a function (*vyāpāra*) operating here, *bhāvanā*, and so does not need *vāsanā*. Abhinava, *Locana ad Dhvanyāloka* 1.1, ed. S. Kuppuswami Śāstri (Madras, 1944), pp. 78-79.
32. Clearly expressed in Abhinava's discussion of the ninth *rasa*, *śānta*. Ibid., p. 336.
33. Verse of Nāyaka cited in *Locana*. Ibid.
34. Nāyaka seems to have been influenced by Sāṃkhya (De, *History of Sanskrit Poetics*, vol. 2, pp. 125, 183). This conclusion, though, resembles more the *mīmāṃsaka* arguing an *apūrva*.
35. Borrowing from Nāyaka, *Nāṭyaśāstra*, p. 277; cf. De, *Problems of Sanskrit Poetics*, p. 13 and note.
36. De, *Problems of Sanskrit Poetics*, p. 54 and note.
37. That is, the content of real perceptions; cf. *Tattvakaumudī* (Poona Oriental Series 10), p. 120.
38. *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Kāvya-mālā Series No. 94 (Bombay: Nirmaya Sagar Press).
39. Abhinavagupta explores equivocally that oneness in terms of *śānta rasa*, the ninth *rasa*, superadded to Bharata's original eight probably as an attempt to incorporate not only *kāvya*, but also epic (especially the *Mahābhārata*) within the dramatic genre. On the one hand the ninth *rasa* appears to be different from the other eight in kind, insofar as it has no *sthāyibhāva* (contra Ānandavardhana, who proposed *nirveda*) other than the *tattvasvarūpa* (essence of the *ātman*). On the other, the contemplation of the impermanence of all things (which indicates the sense in which the *Mahābhārata* dramatized the effect of tranquility) is precisely not different from the content of any *rasa*, as awareness, and especially *śṛṅgāra*, which heretofore has been considered the *rasa* par excellence (only because of its importance, not its generality). Abhinava's explanation provides *śānta* with any of the other *rasa* as content, as colors projected on the wall of the *ātman*. *Śānta* is thus both the same and different, and we might term this intermediate position the *bhādabhedha* view of the *rasa* generalization. But Abhinava doesn't seem all that happy with the problematic character of the nouveauté of *śāntarasa*. On this controversy, see J. Masson and M. Patwardhan, *Śāntarasa and Abhinavagupta's Philosophy of Aesthetics* (Poona: B.O.R.I., 1969); and review-article by E. Gerow and A. Aklujkar, "On Śānta Rasa in Sanskrit Poetics," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 92, no. 1 (January-March 1972):80-87.
40. *Cattanyacaritāmṛta*, ed. and trans. E. C. Dimock, Jr. (in manuscript), Madhya 8, 111; "He who is the *mūrti* of the nectar of all the *rasas* . . . that moon beloved of Rādhā. . . ." Admittedly, this exclusivity of *śṛṅgāra* is prefigured in the poetic works that deal with *rasa* only (as the *Ekavālī*); but *śṛṅgāra* is never there seen to constitute the other *rasas*.
41. Ibid., 2.8.22; translated and cited from an essay by Kanika Sircar.
42. Though the present essay might be regarded as an inquiry into the bases of such possible judgments. Others interested in the modernization of aesthetic traditions are Rachel Van Meter Baumer, "The Place of the Bengali Novel in

- the Development of Modern Indian Fiction" (unpublished paper), and M. Christopher Byrski.
43. See Edwin Gerow, "The Quintessential Narayan," *Literature East and West* 10 (1-2): 1-12.
  44. Unless we adopt Macauley's point of view and welcome the arbitration of "a class of persons 'Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinion, in morals and in intellect.'" *Minute* of 2 February 1835, cited in *Cambridge History of India*, vol. 6, p. 111.
  45. For a parallel view, see M. C. Bryski, "Prācīna Nāṭyakalā aur adhunika Calacitra," *Rāṣṭravāṇī*, March 1965, pp. 363-366.
  46. Gerow, "The Quintessential Narayan," p. 8.
  47. The Tamil film, *Pava Manṭṭpu*, for instance, brings the motif of the changed heads up to date. By accidents at birth, a Moslem boy is brought up in a Hindu home; a Hindu boy in a Moslem home. After much melodrama, the essential reality of human brotherhood behind the facade of caste prejudice is understood. Starring Śivaji Gaṇeśan.
  48. "Culture" here as the form in which experience is made public—not its context.
  49. M. Singer, "The Great Tradition in a Metropolitan Center: Madras," in *Traditional India: Structure and Change* (Philadelphia: American Folklore Society, 1959), pp. 145-155.
  50. From "What is Art?" cited in M. Rader, *A Modern Book of Aesthetics* (New York: H. Holt, 1935), p. 103.
  51. Theodor Lipps, *Archiv für die gesamte Psychologie*, vol. 1, cited in Rader, p. 293.
  52. DeWitt Parker, quoted in Rader, p. 359.
  53. Proceedings of the Sixth International Congress of Philosophy, 1926, pp. 460-461; cited in Rader, pp. 360-361.
  54. From *Psychology of Beauty*, 1905; cited in Rader, p. 378. Interestingly for our point about the peripherality of these notions in Western aesthetics, Rader has dropped the entire section on synaesthesia from his revised versions.
  55. Cited by F. O. Matthiessen, *The Achievement of T. S. Eliot* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1935), pp. 108, 111.
  56. Ibid.
  57. T. S. Eliot, *After Strange Gods* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1934), pp. 43-44.



# PART IV

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## RESOURCES FOR PERFORMANCE



BECAUSE THERE REMAINS no living tradition of Sanskrit performance it is necessary to place great reliance on indirect sources of information. In part four several of these sources are considered. They are described and problems involved in using them as resources for performance are discussed.

Darius L. Swann begins by reviewing the ways in which the many regional theater forms performed today in India may relate to the performing tradition of ancient times. He says it is "unlikely that many . . . forms can be shown to be ancient" nor are they lineal descendants of ancient theater. He then deals with the issue of the validity of using them as examples, either in whole or in part, of ancient practices. He cites the various theories: that Sanskrit theater developed from popular theater forms; that contemporary regional forms are "degraded remnants" of ancient Sanskrit theater; and that classical and regional theater developed simultaneously but independently and with little interchange between them. The need for careful consideration of the validity of the presumed relation between classical and regional theater practices is apparent in that, in their studies, V. Raghavan, Farley Richmond, M. Christopher Byrski, Shanta Gandhi, and Kapila Vatsyayan turn, inescapably, to evidence drawn from regional forms. At this time no theory purporting to explain this relationship seems overwhelmingly convincing. It can be hoped that future investigation, directed specifically to this question, may provide a more conclusive view of this crucial topic. Swann continues by investigating the round dance in the contemporary Rās Līlā devotional dance play, concluding that it almost certainly derives from the *rāsaka* dance described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

Among regional theater forms none has drawn more attention since its "discovery" by Indian scholars two decades ago than Kūṭiyāṭṭam, the only form in which plays of the classical Sanskrit period are still performed (among them, *The Vision of Vāsavadatta*). Pragna Thakkar Enros describes performance elements of this form in detail, drawing both on her personal observations and written materials. (The Enros paper, completed after the conference, was not discussed by participants.) Written materials are unusually valuable. Stage manuals (*kramadīpikā* and *aṭṭaprakāra*) are available for each play in the repertory: one type is similar to a

production book, and the other describes the acting of all roles. For example, there is a manual (*hastalakṣaṇaḍṭpikā*) that describes the system of hand gestures (*hastā*) used in performance. Some of these manuals are very old and have been handed down in acting families for generations.

In Kūṭiyāṭṭam, it is usual for a single act (not the whole play) to be performed, the successive scenes of that act requiring four or five nights to complete. But this is the modern, speeded-up style. If actors followed the manuals for one act of the play *Wonderful Crest Jewel* (*Āścaryacūḍamaṇī*), it is estimated that it would take them forty-one nights to finish the single act. This is because gestural interpretation can spin out a few lines of verse into several hours of performance. Entrances tend to be very long. A character may digress from the story of the play to enact in mime earlier episodes in that character's life, including taking roles of other characters who appear in these "flashback" episodes. There are lengthy opening and closing rituals. Music is less complex than that described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, and dance plays only a minor role. Kūṭiyāṭṭam is the precursor of the better known Kathakali dance drama and shares with it a number of performance characteristics.

Noting that it is an extremely large and complex task to sort out the relationships between Sanskrit theater and regional theater of today, participants did not explore the subject in discussion, except in the case of Kūṭiyāṭṭam. Kūṭiyāṭṭam follows the *Nāṭyaśāstra* principle of "rasa attribution" for scenes and parts of scenes. Emotional states are clearly conveyed through vocal qualities. Examples of erotic, heroic, and pathetic vocal qualities were demonstrated (Byrski). At the same time, there is sharp disagreement about the extent to which the Kerala form is representative of Sanskrit practice. In one view, Kūṭiyāṭṭam essentially follows the practice described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, except in details such as vocal enunciation and in musical style in which local Kerala styles have undoubtedly entered into and changed the ancient Sanskrit style. By the eleventh century ancient Sanskrit theater practice had become established in Kerala, and Kūṭiyāṭṭam can be believed to be the direct descendant of that period (Raghavan).

On the other hand, there is the view that Kūṭiyāṭṭam is a degen-

eration and a perversion of ancient performance techniques. Especially, it can be noted that the interpolated flashbacks of Kūṭiyāṭam, which take so much time, and the long jester sequences seen in today's performances are nowhere indicated in Sanskrit play texts or in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. It can be argued that they have been interpolated into the original texts in Malayālam, the local vernacular language, because Sanskrit could not be understood by the Kerala audience. Thus, since the plays are not really the original Sanskrit dramas, as usually is implied, but are adaptations of them, we are on shaky ground in using this corrupted form of Sanskrit production as a model of ancient practice (Byrski).

Considerable discussion was devoted to the *Nāṭyaśāstra* as a production source. How valuable is it to the director or the actor today? One opinion is that it shares with most Indian *śāstra*, or treatises, the "thirty-six types" syndrome, suggesting that its elaborate system for classifying performance elements is theoretical and not derived from actual stage practice, at least in part (Eliot Deutsch). The opposite opinion is that precisely because the *Nāṭyaśāstra* was written as a guidebook for producer, actor, dancer, musician, and stage craftsman, the author(s) was required to go into concrete detail to make it wholly practical (Raghavan). It is confused in organization, with many sections repeating information in other sections. It is striking that the legends of the creation of drama found in the first and the last chapters are not the same and even include wholly different sets of deities connected with the theater. We are therefore almost certain that the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is not the work of one author, but that it is a compilation of materials written by several people at different times (Byrski). We cannot expect this single book to tell us everything about the theater of its time, because any written work—even the *Vedas*—describes only a part of a total culture (Ludo Rocher). Unfortunately, in the present English translation, a large number of terms make little theatrical sense and cannot be understood easily, if at all, by the nonspecialist reader (Richmond, James R. Brandon).

In summary, while the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is not a perfect text, and while it is not fully understood, it is all we have and we must do with it what we can (Raghavan). Rocher suggests that the solution



to many perplexing questions not yet satisfactorily answered lies in preparing, at last, a thorough, new, critical edition of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. This should be carried out by a team of Indian and Western scholars and theater artists, conducted in a rigorous fashion, utilizing all available manuscripts.

# Rās Līlā and the Sanskrit Drama

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*Darius L. Swann*

THE SANSKRIT THEATER of India is well defined. It rests upon a number of theoretical works on drama and the theater, notably the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, and an impressive group of Sanskrit plays, literary in quality and conforming generally to the canons of dramaturgy laid down in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and subsequent treatises on the theatrical arts. By contrast, material on the traditional theater is very scarce.

The term "traditional theater" is used here to denote those forms which are distinguished from folk theater by clearly defined and recognized forms and a literature of some merit. Moreover, these genres, which have been passed on for generations by composers and performers, have depended upon the common people for patronage in contrast to the Sanskrit theater which, in its full flowering, catered to a restricted upper-class clientele.

The dominance given the Sanskrit theater in scholarly studies has helped to obscure the role of the traditional forms as bearers of the Indian theater tradition. The low esteem in which the traditional theater was until recently held accounts for the lack of scholarly interest in forms such as the one which is the subject of this study. An Indian author of several decades past wrote slightly of them as "the medieval degraded forms of folk amusement" but conceded that they are "lineal descendants of the most ancient types."<sup>1</sup>

Sanskrit drama continued to be written until the nineteenth century, but it reached its zenith with Kālidāsa,<sup>2</sup> and by the time of Bhavabhūti (ca. A.D. 700), it was in decline. Although the Sanskrit theater as performance died, forms of traditional theater contin-

ued to live. Given the rich variety of forms that are extant from Kashmir to Cape Comorin, it is unthinkable that Indian theater could have perished with the decline of Sanskrit forms. That several existing traditional forms date back at least to the medieval period is beyond question. The assertion that these forms are the "lineal descendants of the most ancient types" has not been conclusively proven, however. The objective of this chapter is to establish that one traditional form, that is, the Rās Līlā, does relate to ancient types of Sanskrit drama described in the treatises on dramatic arts.

The first clues lie in the forms of drama detailed in ancient Indian treatises on drama and poetics. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* lists only the ten major types of drama (*rūpaka*) but several other treatises also list minor or "near drama" types (*uparūpaka*). It is among these that the prototypes of contemporary traditional forms of theater should be sought.<sup>3</sup> The various treatises do not agree concerning the number of the latter; the longer list (twenty) is in the *Bhāva-prakāśa*, an ancient treatise on poetics. The problem is that scholars must rely almost totally on the theoreticians for information in the absence of examples of these forms (except as they may be identified with existing forms). While the major types (*rūpaka*) developed from *nāṭya*, that is, from full-fledged theatrical representation capable of arousing sentiment (*rasa*), the minor types (*uparūpaka*), which are essentially musical drama, evolved from *nṛṭya*, which has a mimetic element but no dialogue and is capable of arousing only emotion (*bhāva*).

Mankad shows that there was development and growth within each genre itself, so that what may be called an *uparūpaka* at one period may differ considerably from a later sample. So theoreticians of different periods are not always speaking of the same thing though they may be using the same terms. The early forms of the minor type were merely musicals; that is, they included music and dancing, but no dialogue. If there was story in these earlier forms, it would seem that it was composed of songs "sung to musical accompaniment with appropriate histrionics."<sup>4</sup>

A number of existing traditional forms precisely fit this description. Like the *uparūpaka* types most of the contemporary traditional forms are essentially musical but do carry some speech and story. Yātrā, because of the predominance of songs in it, has often been termed "sacred opera." Svāṅg is also operatic in character.

Some forms are open to adaptation either to a more musical or to a more dramatic presentation. As the major types evolved from and developed side by side with the minor types the former, with its dialogue, probably influenced the latter to become more dramatic by the addition of speech. Raghavan is sure that the minor types throw light on the history of the surviving traditional genres. He writes, "The *uparūpaka* is the link or the common ground where the classic met the popular, and the sophisticated took up the folk-form; and therefore an inquiry into the nature of these *uparūpakas* is highly valuable."<sup>5</sup>

The Rās Līlā is one of the surviving traditional theater forms clearly related to types listed in treatises on drama. Before discussing its relationship to ancient forms, a brief description of modern Rās Līlā needs to be given. Modern Rās Līlā is a form of theater based upon the Kṛṣṇa legend in which song and dance predominate. The all-male cast of actors and dancers is supported by an orchestra-chorus which shares the singing and provides accompaniment for the dance. The orchestra instruments are usually a harmonium, cymbals, and drums (*tabla*, *mṛdaṅga*, or *pakhāvaj*).

A performance is divided into two parts. The first part, the Nitya Rās, consists almost entirely of song and dance and represents the lovemaking of the god Kṛṣṇa and his consort Rādhā in the eternal divine realm. The second part, the *līlā*, represents in song, dance, and dialogue an event from the life of Kṛṣṇa, the avatar, during his sojourn in the region of Braj (located in north central India).

The order of the Nitya Rās is fixed; all troupes follow the order below with minor modifications:

The invocatory song (*maṅgalācarāṇa*) followed by music conducive to devotion, sung by the chorus.

The *ārati* song and ceremony (ritual of waving of the lights) by the Sakhīs (the companions of Rādhā), Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa on the throne.

A series of songs and dances: a dance with Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā and the Sakhīs moving in a circle; a dance with the group kneeling in a circle; a line formation with the actors dancing in turn, beginning with Kṛṣṇa; the peacock dance performed by Kṛṣṇa on his knees.

An interval during which the curtain is drawn while the actors rest and the orchestra-chorus provides music.

The sermon, or discourse, may be placed here.

A group song.

A group song and dance with the actors in a line.

An interval follows in which the final tableau is prepared and one of the Sakhīs entertains the audience.

The final tableau with offerings from the spectators.

After an interval of five to ten minutes, the *līlā* begins. It does not have a set order like the Nitya Rās; it may deal with any incident from Kṛṣṇa's life in Braj.

The Rās Līlā is performed in an atmosphere thick with religious devotion upon which it draws and to which it contributes. Especially associated with the Braj region, the place of Kṛṣṇa's birth, childhood, and youth, the Rās Līlā is performed to make real and present to the spectator the divine love of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. The spectator celebrants are an intimate community of faith, for the action takes place among them. Highly charged poetry, vivid with the imagery and symbolism of the Kṛṣṇa myth, fine singing, lively rhythmic dancing, and the spectators' attitude of reverence create an atmosphere in which people respond fervently to the shout: "Victory to Bihāri Lāl of Vṛndāban!" or "Rādhā Śyāml!" or are caught up in singing hymns (*kīrtana*); "Hail to Govinda, hail to Gopāla, hail to Rādhā, the beautiful one!" Individuals sometimes stand up and join in the dance, swaying as if in trance. On one occasion I observed an old holy man (*sādhu*), gray-bearded and balding and clad in a single saffron cloth, dance, doing fast pirouettes (*cakkar*) as though he were a youth of thirteen. The spectators, transformed into participants, turned round and round, clapping and singing until the atmosphere of the occasion rivaled that of a black Baptist revival meeting. The audience sang in response to the *sādhu*'s clapping and singing, and as the clapping got faster and faster and the drum rhythms more and more insistent, the emotions of the audience approached ecstasy. With eyes closed, their hands clapping rhythmically, bodies swaying as one, they seemed unconscious of their surroundings.

On the basis of available evidence it seems probable that the term *rās* is derived from *rasa*; that is, *rās* is a circular dance in which the erotic sentiment (*śṛṅgāra rasa*) is dominant. This conclusion is supported by Paurāṇic descriptions of the *rās* dance in

which excitants and stimulants to the erotic sentiment are prominent, such as the fragrance of flowers, a beautiful moonlight night, physical fondling, embracing, and the like.<sup>6</sup>

Although, as we have mentioned, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* lists only the major types of drama, among the minor types listed in later works we find clear antecedents of the present-day Rās Līlā: a Hallisaka, a Rāsaka, and in some lists a Nāṭyarāsaka. These three forms appear to be closely related. Lakṣmī Nārāyaṇ Garg has demonstrated close relationship on the basis of descriptions in the treatises on poetics:

Hallisaka, Rās and Rāsaka are very close to one another. Abhinava Gupta, in his commentary on the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, describes Rāsaka and Hallisaka thus: "Hallisaka is that which is rich in dance [*nṛtya*] performed in a circle. In it there should be one hero, in the manner of Lord Hari Kṛṣṇa among the Gopīs. Many *rāgas* and *tālas* and many kinds of *laya* enter into it." Sixty-four couples, that is sixty-four pairs of males and females, can be in it. Bhoja gives the same description in *Śṛṅgāra Prakāśa*. In *Nāṭya Darpana* it is said that in Hallisaka twelve or sixteen females dance with hands joined.<sup>7</sup>

Apparently the Hallisaka dance was circular, usually with a large number of female dancers (*nāyikā*, or heroines), and with one male dancer (*nāyaka*, or hero) at the center of a closed circle formed by the female dancers joining hands. An alternate form allowed for a male partner for each of the female dancers. The *Hari-varṇṣa Purāṇa* account and the books on dramatic theory suggest that the Hallisaka dance was an early form of Rās Līlā or the form from which it was developed.<sup>8</sup> That the description of the Hallisaka dance found in this *Purāṇa* corresponds in every way to the descriptions of the *rās* in later *Purāṇas* argues for their close similarity, if not identity. In the *Kāma Sūtra* (a treatise on the arts of love), Vātsyāyana refers to both Hallisaka and Rās Līlā:

Lovers will find that if they dally with each other in pleasing ways and so create confidence in each other, both at the commencement and the end of the congress, they will heighten the love between them. These acts please both their tastes, dispel anger and enhance love, acts such as Hallisaka and other dances, songs, dramatic performances, women moving in a circle and singing [*rās*], gazing at the moon and the stars with love-laden eyes glistening with emotion.<sup>9</sup>

According to Abhinavagupta's commentary on the *Nāṭyaśāstra* there are three kinds of *rāsaka* dances: *tālarāsaka*, *daṇḍarāsaka*, and *maṇḍalarāsaka*. *Talarāsaka*, as the name indicates (*tāla*—hand clapping, also rhythm), is a dance done to the accompaniment of the hands marking the time. In *daṇḍarāsaka* (also termed *lakuṭarāsaka*) the performers dance to the rhythmic beat of sticks (*danda* and *lakuṭa* both mean “stick”) which they carry in their hands. The *maṇḍalarāsaka* (*maṇḍala* means circle) is a circular group dance in which both men and women participate.<sup>10</sup> The *maṇḍalarāsaka* became most important in the dance of the present Rās Līlā stage, although all three forms of this dance may still be found among the folk dances of the Braj area and other parts of India.<sup>11</sup> It is now generally agreed that the *rāsaka* of the Sanskrit treatises is an early form of the present-day Rās Līlā.<sup>12</sup>

The early Rās Līlā developed in three forms: as *nṛtya* dance (classified among the minor dramatic types or *uparūpaka*), song (*geyarāsaka*), and Nāṭyarāsaka. Extant Rās Līlā songbooks show that the *geyarāsaka* were popular all over India, but were not performed on stage. Rām Nārāyan Agrawāl says that “whereas on the one hand these Rās songs were the media for the presentation of important religious sentiments and ethical teaching, on the other hand their sweet verses were also the subject of singing in seasonal festivals.”<sup>13</sup> The popularity of this style of singing brought about the development of a new style of performance, combining music (*saṃgīt*) and recital (*kathā*), known as Rāskathā. Today some performers (*rāsdhārī*) sing the Rās Līlā in the manner of *kathā*, that is, without a performing troupe.<sup>14</sup>

The Nāṭyarāsaka is sometimes distinguished from the Rāsaka and sometimes not.<sup>15</sup> According to the treatises on poetics, it differs from Rāsaka only in one way: in the Rāsaka (which is *nṛtya* with a dramatic element) Kṛṣṇa is always the hero; in the Nāṭyarāsaka there are other heroes.

The treatises on poetics indicate that the Nāṭyarāsaka was a one-act, minor type of play, resembling the *bhāṇa* (“amorous monologue”), which gradually developed with dance and song predominating and achieved the status of a fully developed drama (*rūpaka*).

In summary, the Rās Līlā, standing as a representative of minor (*uparūpaka*) types, is a legitimate and important part of the ancient Indian theater tradition. It can be considered minor only in

the sense that it attempts no large themes, and it depends much less than the Sanskrit drama on mimetic acting and dialogue. But it takes its place alongside Sanskrit theater in displaying those characteristics which the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and other treatises ascribe to drama. While references to the forerunners of the Rās Līlā—Rāsaka, Hallisaka, and Nāṭyarāsaka—are brief, there is sufficient description in Bhoja's *Śṛṅgāra Prakāśa* to establish a clear identity with present-day forms.

There are several points at which the Rās Līlā, both in its ancient and present form, exhibits basic characteristics of the major tradition of Sanskrit theater: in the preliminaries to the performance; the integral role of music and dance; the importance given to time measures (*tāla*) in relation to dance and music; the use of group dancing patterns (*piṇḍibandha*); and the acceptance of *rasa* evocation as the aesthetic objective of performance.

*The preliminaries of the performance.* The Rās Līlā shares with the Sanskrit drama the sense of the dramatic art as dependent upon the goodwill and protection of the gods. While Rās Līlā makes use of no elaborate preliminaries as described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (4.12–15), the essential elements of the Sanskrit preliminaries are encouched in the invocation (*maṅgalācaraṇa*), which the troupe leader sings, and the *ārati* song and ritual performed by the milkmaids immediately after. It should be noted that while items like “arranging musical instruments,” “seating of the singers,” adjusting musical instruments for singing, and so on are included in the preliminaries described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the treatise also states that “the Utthāpana [literally, “raising”] ceremony which is so styled because from this the reciters of the Benediction start [literally, “raise”] first of all in the stage the performance of the play. Hence the Utthāpana is considered by some to be the beginning of the performance” (5.22–23). By contrast, the Rās Līlā preliminaries begin with the offering of homage to the teacher and to the dieties, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, and immediately after that the performance proper begins. The devotional walking around (*paṇivar-tana*) for the dieties of the different worlds, described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, is absent from the Rās Līlā.

*The role of music and dance.* From the evidence of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* it appears that Sanskrit drama was conceived as dance drama, for out of a total of thirty-six chapters, five are devoted en-



tirely to music and three to dance. It can be argued, as V. Raghavan does, that the forms represented by the Rās Līlā incorporate the essence of the ancient Indian tradition. "Although ancient Indian drama or Sanskrit drama as envisaged by Bharata is of the nature of dance-drama, with music and dance movement, it is the Uparūpaka class of performances that is so *par excellence*; for in them music and dance predominate; most of them are merely dance accompanied by songs, interpreting [through] Abhinaya or gesture the emotional contents of the songs."<sup>16</sup>

The Rās Līlā, as we have noted, is preponderantly music and dance. The first part, the Nitya Rās, has no dialogue at all with the exception of the barest exchange at the time of the ritual invitation to Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā to come to the dancing floor. The dialogue of the second part, the *līlā*, is not negligible, but it is heavily outweighed by song and dance.

*The time measures (tala).* The importance of the time measures in Sanskrit drama is suggested by the fact that the *Nāṭyaśāstra* devotes an entire chapter (26) of 502 verses to the subject. Among the things in which the director of a play should be competent is knowledge of the rules of the time measures (36.65–71). It is equally obvious that the time measure is of great importance in the Rās Līlā performance. The *Abhinavabhāratī* gives a description of Rāsaka as "a dance in various *talas*, which is delicate as well as forceful and which is done by various ladies."<sup>17</sup> In today's Rās Līlā the importance of the time measure in the music is everywhere evident. It is underscored by the rhythm of the drums and cymbals, the ankle bells of the dancers, and the rhythmic patterns (*bol*) spoken by the troupe leader.

Early forms of the Rās Līlā were partially distinguished by the way in which the time measure was marked. Thus the names of two of the Rāsakas—the *tālarāsaka* and *daṇḍārāsaka*—refer to the fact that time was kept to the dance by the clapping of the hands in one and the beating of sticks in the other.

*Dance group formations.* It has been stated above that the Rās Līlā contains a series of dances which display the dancers in various patterns or formations. Sometimes they dance in a circle with joined hands, sometimes by twos, sometimes individually. Sometimes they weave intricate patterns. These dances appear to correspond to the *piṇḍibandha* referred to in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.<sup>18</sup> -

Raghavan's summary of a section of *Śṛṅgāra Prakāśa* by Bhoja shows even clearer evidence of such a connection. This section, dealing with the Nāṭyarāsaka, is the largest and most detailed description of a form of the minor dramatic type (*uparūpaka*) in Bhoja's work. It identifies the Nāṭyarāsaka as a dance performed in various patterns and group movements by female dancers in the spring season. One pair of dancers enters, scatters flowers, dances, and goes. They are followed by other pairs who form groups and execute various patterns of movement. Singing and instrumentation are accompanied by the striking together of sticks and the recital of rhythmic syllables.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, the Rās Līlā is clearly constructed on *the central aesthetic concept of Hindu dramaturgy*, namely *rasa*. Although the predominant *rasa* in the Rās Līlā is the erotic, there is ample opportunity for evoking the comic, pathetic, and heroic *rasa* as well. It is clear that the dominant *rasa* is here evoked by all those stimulants suggested in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*; favorable seasons, garlands, ornaments, and so on. The predominance of music and dance tend to intensify the impact of the erotic sentiment.

In conclusion, it seems probable that the Rās Līlā dances derive from ancient prototypes which were minor forms in the classical Sanskrit dramatic tradition. The *rās* dances probably originated as folk expressions connected with seasonal festivals. They were adapted to a religious use in the sixteenth century by the great devotional (*bhakti*) saints of North India who set the dances to their songs in praise of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. It is from this period that the Rās Līlā developed into the religious theater that it now is. Its existence as a form that has been shown to have ancient prototypes is significant, for it suggests that Rās Līlā may have preserved enough elements of the ancient traditions and sufficient vitality to become a source of renewal for the theater of high artistic value and genuine Indianness.

## Notes

1. R. K. Yajnik, *The Indian Theatre* (New York: George Allen & Unwin, 1934), p. 52; Chandra Bhan Gupta, *The Indian Theatre* (Banaras: Motilal Banarasi-dass, 1954), p. 160.

2. For dating of Kalidāsa, see A. Berridale Keith, *The Sanskrit Drama* (Oxford, 1924), pp. 143-147.
3. D. R. Mankad, *The Types of Sanskrit Drama* (Karachi: Urmi Prakashan Mandir, 1936), pp. 12-24.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 133. See Keith, *The Sanskrit Drama*, p. 351.
5. V. Raghavan, "Uparūpakas and Nṛtṭyaprabandhas," *Sangeet Natak* 2 (April 1966):8-9.
6. There is striking evidence of the connection between *rās* and *śṛṅgāra rasa* in the traditional folk dances which continue today among the Brajvāsīs. On March 13, 1971, which fell during the Holi festival celebrations, I did a circumambulation of Govardhan with six Hindu friends. At about nine o'clock at night we stopped at Mukhrai village where we saw the *charakala* dance in which maidens one after another danced in a circular pattern with four-tiered circular stands of lighted lamps carried on their heads. Then followed folk dances accompanied by ear-splitting rhythms on two huge kettledrums about a yard or more in diameter, played by two men each. The resemblance of these dances to those of the Rās Līlā was quite evident. Specifically, I noted the following similarities:

(1) A basic foot movement in which one foot bears the body weight firmly on its heel and ball while the other foot takes the weight only on the ball of the foot and is used for pivoting;

(2) Frequent pivots and pirouettes (*cakkar*), especially by the woman partner, making graceful swirling movements of the long full skirt;

(3) The partners' circling of each other, back to back, in the manner of the do-si-do of Western square dance;

(4) The constant use of hand gestures by the dancers, conveying the impression of inviting and offering, the male taking the offensive but the female responding to his every initiative;

(5) A frequent wide stance by the male dancer, the upper torso bent backward thus thrusting forward the pelvic region while slowly pivoting and maintaining a steady foot beat;

(6) The men invariably beginning the dance by running several steps, jumping, and taking a deep knee bend before the female partner (as a kind of invitation to dance), then rising and beginning the dance.

Under a full, brilliant moon by a pond of water it was easy to imagine Kṛṣṇa sporting merrily with the maide... 'Braj.

The dance area was roughly circular, defined by the surrounding villagers, and the three couples moved about the area freely without coordinating their movements with each other. Rather there seemed the utmost concentration of the partners upon each other.

The dances were accompanied by songs of rather explicit sexual references sung by a small group of musicians. (Example: "If you don't bring me a silver waistband, I'll not sleep with you.") The women never uncover their faces throughout the dance, thus largely depersonalizing it. A part of the boisterous bawdiness of course must be attributed to the Holi festival which is traditionally celebrated with such songs, but references to *rās līlā* in them furnish an interesting and important point of reference concerning *rās* on the Rās Līlā stage. Undoubtedly a "secular" dance has been adapted to the service of religion. Its sexual references have been spiritualized into a holy mystery which Bhakti teachers say has nothing to do with sensual pleasure.

7. Lakṣmī Nārāyaṇ Garg, *Rās Līlā: Ek Parichay* (Delhi, 1959), pp. 26-27. *Śṛṅ-*

*gāra Prakāśa* and *Nāṭya Darpana* are treatises dealing with literary criticism and dramatic art respectively.

8. Kṛṣṇa Datt Vājpeyī, "Braj ki Kālā," in *Braj Lok Samskr̥ti* (Mathura), p. 142. The *Purāṇas* are Hindu mythological scriptures, eighteen in number.
9. S. C. Upadhyaya, trans., *Kāmasūtra of Vātsyāyana* (Bombay, 1961), pt. 2, chap. 10, vv. 25 ff., p. 134. The commentator Yaśodhara interprets the Sanskrit to mean that Hallisaka is that dance in which one leader (male) dances in a circle of many women, as Kṛṣṇa with the Gopīs. See also Vājpeyī, "Braj ki Kālā," in *Braj Lok Samskr̥ti*, pp. 142 ff.; and Agrawāl, "Rās ke Udaya aur Samksipt Itihās," in *Rās Līlā: Ek Parichay* (Delhi, 1959), p. 3.
10. Kṛṣṇa Datt Vājpeyī, "Sanskrit Sāhitya aur Rās Līlā," in *Rās Līlā: Ek Parichay*, p. 31.
11. During the festival of Holi in 1971, in and around Govardhan I saw folk dances in which hand clapping and the use of sticks prevailed.
12. In *Rās Līlā*, Agrawāl, Garg, and Vājpeyī all refer to *rāsaka* in relation to *rās*, pp. 2-4, 16-17, 30-31.
13. Agrawāl, "Braj ka Rās Raṅgmañc" (unpublished manuscript), p. 51.
14. Agrawāl, "Braj ka Rās Raṅgmañc," pp. 51-52.
15. See Pramada Dasa Mitra, *The Mirror of Composition* (Banaras, 1956), p. 174; and V. Raghavan, *Bhoja's Śṛṅgāra Prakāśa*, (Madras: Punarvasu, 1963), pp. 588-889.
16. V. Raghavan, *Bhoja's Śṛṅgāra Prakāśa*, p. 546.
17. Raghavan, p. 262.
18. Chap. 4. 257-262, 284-285, 291-294.
19. Raghavan, p. 563.

# Producing Sanskrit Plays in the Tradition of Kūṭiyāṭṭam

*Pragna Thakkar Enros*

KŪṬIYĀṬṬAM is the only surviving performance tradition of the classical Sanskrit plays written between the second and eleventh centuries A.D. and is believed to have come into existence during the tenth century. According to *Vyaṅgyavyākhyā*, a contemporary commentary on the plays *Subhadrā and Dhanañjaya* (*Subhadrā-dhanañjaya*) and *Tapati and Samvaraṇa* (*Tapatisamvaraṇa*), the tenth-century Kerala playwright Kūlaśekhara Varman, with help from Tolan, his minister and poet, revised the existing local practice of performing Sanskrit plays.<sup>1</sup> This practice, of course, with some natural changes, is still preserved in Kerala. It survived there because of its close association with temple festivals and a particular caste. Only this caste, divided into actors (*cākyār*), drummers (*nāmbiyār*), and their women singers and actresses (*nāṇṇiyār*), was allowed to perform in this tradition. Families of this caste, strictly attached to various temples, performed during temple festivals; in this way Kūṭiyāṭṭam was confined to the temples. In fact, all the major temples of Kerala have temple theaters (*kūṭambalam*) which are built especially for performances and are known for their excellent acoustics and suitability as theaters. At present, however, there are only seven actor families,<sup>2</sup> and of these, only a few members are actively involved in performing and continuing Kūṭiyāṭṭam.

The real importance of Kūṭiyāṭṭam in the history of the production of Sanskrit plays lies in the stage manuals which have been handed down from generation to generation. The dates they were written are uncertain, although tradition attributes their introduction to Tolan. Linguistic evidence in the available stage manuals,

according to Narayana Pisharoti,<sup>3</sup> shows some of them to be old and others of a more recent period. The stage manuals give full details for the direction and production of performances. Some of these stage manuals are in the form of manuscripts. Others are maintained by oral tradition and are used by the existing actors as their personal notes for performances. The language of these stage manuals is the local language of Kerala, Malayālam, with a few exceptions—for example, the stage manual of the play, *Delight of Snakes (Nāgānanda)*<sup>4</sup>—which are in Sanskrit.

In the practice of performing Sanskrit plays these stage manuals play an important part and have a unique position in the history of Indian theater art. There are two kinds of stage manuals—*kramadīpikā* and *aṭṭaparakāra*. Although they overlap very much in content, and it is difficult at times to distinguish between them, they may be broadly defined as follows. The *kramadīpikā* give details from the directional point of view. They deal with such aspects as stage decoration, makeup, costume, blocking or stage composition, entries and exits, modes of speech (*vācika abhinaya*), music, dance, duration of performances, rituals, remuneration of actors, and so on. The *aṭṭaparakāra* (literally, “style of acting”) are more like actor’s notes. They explain in detail how and what an actor should do in order to interpret and enact convincingly the content of the play. In order to do this, they also provide the introduction to the text of the play and its interpretation, which is acted only in gesture. There are some additional verses which help the actor to tell the past story or create the background for the present situation of the act in flashback (*nirvahaṇa*); the verses for the additions in the performance of the jester are in the nature of a supplement to this type of stage manual. These verses are gesticulated by the actors and then sung by the female singers.

This paper will examine various aspects of Kūṭiyāṭṭam as a style of production, employing a study of the stage manuals and observations of actual performances.

## FORMAT OF THE PERFORMANCE

Full-length Sanskrit plays are not performed in their entirety in Kūṭiyāṭṭam; different acts are treated as independent units or independent plays. The amount of time necessary to perform one act may vary greatly. Additions, such as preplay activities or prelimi-

naries (*pūrvaraṅga*), describing the past in flashback (*nirvahaṇa*), and the elaboration of the text according to the stage manuals, can increase the time needed to perform the actual text of the act to as much as three nights. Indeed, there are stage manuals available for the act "Presentation of the Ring" (*Anguliyāṅkam*) from the play *Wonderful Crest Jewel* (*Āścaryacūḍamaṇi*) which would take forty-one nights to perform in a proper and effective way.<sup>6</sup> The performance of the act "Slaying of Vālin" (*Valivadhāṅka*) from the play *Consecration* (*Abhiṣeka*), which I witnessed, lasted five nights.

The basic pattern or format of a performance consists of four parts: preplay activities (*pūrvaraṅga*), description of the past in flashback (*nirvahaṇa*), the text itself, and the final rituals (*muṭiyakitta*).

### *Preplay Activities (Pūrvaraṅga)*

The preplay activities<sup>6</sup> can be divided into three subparts: (a) activities behind the scene (*talavilkeṭṭuka*); (b) decoration of the stage (*araṇṇuvitānam*); and (c) the entry announcement (*purappāḍ*).

In the first of these, the actor, finding an auspicious time, is ceremonially shaved. During his bath, water is poured over him by a Brahmin who receives a gift (*dakṣiṇā*) in return. The actor then proceeds to a dressing room where a lamp, rice, and a cloth are kept on a wooden seat. Eight auspicious items (*aṣṭamaṅgalya*)—betel leaves, banana, coconut, sugar, sandalwood paste, flowers, nuts, and rice—should also be kept in the room. Here the patron of the performance gives the actor a fresh unbleached cloth and money. Then the actor goes to the temple, takes a lighted stick from the main lamp, and returns to light the two wicks of the lamp kept on stage.

The actor asks the permission of the patron to tie a headband (*copputuṇi*) on his forehead. Keeping the headband in his hand, he worships Lord Gaṇeśa (the elephant-headed god, destroyer of obstacles) in the green room; then, on stage, he prays to the deities of the temple and of the stage for the success of the play, after which he returns to the green room, bows and prays again to Lord Gaṇeśa and to his family god, performs the action of asking for forgiveness, and sits, with the headband in his lap, facing east if it is morning, west if it is evening. Again he salutes Lord Gaṇeśa, the goddess Sarasvatī (goddess of knowledge), his teacher (*guru*),

Bharatamuni (author of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*), and Lord Śiva (god of dance). Next he touches the ground with his forehead and ties on the headband. He puts purified butter on his face, first making five dots, then spreading it all over. Then he dots his face with color according to his character's type.

When these rituals are completed, the drummer goes onto the stage and begins playing a pot-drum (*mizhavu*) while the actor continues his makeup and costuming. It is believed that once the actor has tied on the headband, he cannot be affected by evil spirits. The costuming that takes place between the tying on of the headband and the putting on of the ear ornament (*cevipuva*), which is the last item, is known as *aṇinnukutuka*.

In the second subpart, the decoration of the stage and rituals by the stage manager (*nāṇḍi-sūtradhāra*) who is played by a drummer, the stage is decorated with banana trees and coconut leaves. The pot-drum(s) is kept in a special place for drums which is between the two doors of the back wall of the stage. On stage right (the actor's right), a white cloth is spread for the female singer(s) to sit on. Another cloth is spread in front of it for the cymbals. A big brass lamp is kept down center stage, and next to it are a full measure of rice (*naraparā*) and the eight auspicious items.

The drummer who is to play the role of the stage manager asks permission of the patron to assume this role. When the actor has finished tying on the headband off stage, the drummer enters the stage from the left door and places a pair of cymbals on the white cloth spread for them. Then he lights the third wick of the lamp, and, approaching from the right side, sits behind the pot-drum. Next, with his thoughts on his family god (*iṣṭadevatā*), he touches the pot-drum and does an obeisance (*abhivādana*). Then, while meditating upon Lord Śiva, he starts playing the pot-drum. The rhythm (*tāla*) usually employed at this time is *ekatāla*. During his playing a Brahmin comes on the stage and, sitting at stage center, worships Lord Gaṇeśa, praying for the success of the play.

After this, the female singer enters and sits on the cloth spread for her, takes the cymbals, and accompanies the drumming. She sings verses (*akkittā*) invoking Lord Gaṇeśa, Śiva, and Sarasvatī.<sup>7</sup> In between these verses, the drummer plays complicated drumming patterns. Their duet is called *goṣṭhi*. Next the drummer sprinkles the stage with holy water, flowers, and sandalwood paste while reciting an invocation (*maṅgalaśloka*). He salutes Brahmā



(the god of creation) by touching the ground and then returns to the green room. The invocation is not part of the text of the play, but is provided by the stage manager according to the *rasa* and the subject matter of the text.<sup>8</sup> This is called *araṅgutali*.

In Kūṭiyāṭṭam, almost all the characters have an entry announcement, but the stage manager and major characters have more elaborate ones. The form and the order of the items of entry announcement are as follows. After the main actor has finished his rituals, makeup, and costuming, a red curtain is held on the stage behind which he enters. The drummer plays a particular rhythm to introduce the actor, who stands facing the pot-drums doing an obeisance to them. He then performs a series of pure dance steps in accordance with the syllables played on the pot-drum. This is called *marayilkriyā*, the dance behind the curtain. The curtain is removed and the actor appears before the audience as a stage manager. The first appearance of this stage manager always presents him in a happy mood. He takes five steps in a set style (*pañcapada-vinyāsa*), comes forward and does obeisance, sitting in a specific posture. In the case of the other characters, the actor establishes the mood of each character and then announces and establishes the character's type through set conventional poses, movements, and steps. This is followed by a short introduction to the text, which is not part of the text of the play and is presented through gesture only. The first part of the text is then recited along with gestures and then repeated with gestures only, often with an elaboration and interpretation of the text.

Next, a set of pure dance movements (*nṛtta*) and gestural interpretations (*nṛtya*) are performed, known as *nityakriyā*. All these are directed to the different deities and some are accompanied by songs recited by the female singer.

The preplay activities performed today in Kūṭiyāṭṭam, although different in detail from those described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata, follow it in spirit. One can point out close similarities between the description of the preplay activities in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and the performance of preplay activities in Kūṭiyāṭṭam.

It should be noted that when the actor performs the pure dance movements and gestural interpretation, he does not do so as a character, but as an actor. He indicates this by a symbolic change in the style of his costume. Taking his upper scarf from his waist to his left shoulder, he ties it into two knots. He also unties the two

ends of his lower garment. After this the actor again becomes the character and returns to the temple, his performance for that night over.

### *The Past in Flashback (Nirvahaṇa)*

In a performance, the past is described in flashback in three stages: *anukrama*, *samkṣepa*, and *nirvahaṇa*. After the first part of the text, which was given in the entry announcement on the previous day, the actor begins the *anukrama*, which consists of describing what has happened in the past through questions. For example, the *anukrama* of Sugrīva, in the first act "Slaying of Vālin" of the play *Consecration* by Bhāsa, begins as follows: "Long ago, in what manner did Sugrīva, the son of the sun, praise Rāma, seeing him piercing seven trees? Before that, how did Sugrīva, along with Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, and Hanumat, start for the war with Vālin?" and so on. While doing this the actor stops at a certain event in the past and narrates a story from the very distant past which is related to the main theme. This relatively short narration is called *samkṣepa*. The third stage, *nirvahaṇa*, answers in reverse orders the questions posed in the first. For example, the first stage of Sugrīva begins with a question regarding the present situation—that is, Rāma's piercing of seven trees to convince Sugrīva of his strength. It ends with a question regarding the origin of the demons Māyavi and Dundubhi. The second stage covers the story of the origin of Vālin and Sugrīva; the third stage begins with the origin of Māyavi and Dundubhi and their death at the hand of Vālin, bringing the story to the present situation, the piercing of seven trees by Rāma.<sup>9</sup> After the three stages of *nirvahaṇa*, the text of the play is picked up and continued.

The first two stages are presented through gesture only. The third is enacted along with verses sung by the female singer after their representation in gesture by the actors. If in the course of the play another major character has an entry announcement and flashback, the action of the play stops while the character goes through these two activities.

Why is this "past in flashback" introduced? Does it have any dramatic significance? It seems to me that this is a very important and distinguishing element of Kūṭiyāṭṭam. It is obvious that through it the past is revealed to the audience. This is important when only acts—which are often selected from the middle of a

play—and not complete plays are performed. It then becomes essential to provide some background. But, looking at the performances, this does not seem to be the main or the only reason for this introduction. As it is, most of the plays are based on well-known epics, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, or the *Purāṇas*, so the basic story is quite familiar to the Indian audience. Further, even when the first acts of plays are performed—for example, “Slaying of Vālin” from *Consecration*, or “Building of a Hut” from *Wonderful Crest Jewel*—the story in flashback is still enacted. Thus, I think there are more convincing reasons for the existence of the story in flashback than simply a recounting of the past.

A story in flashback is very dramatic in its effects and serves a number of purposes. Its format is such that it not only gives the incidents of the past, but also presents fully the personality of the main characters. In other words, it introduces a character’s present situation, past experiences, and basic nature. Thus when the actual text starts, the character’s personality is to a certain extent established, and from this the thread of the story can be picked up and developed. The most important thing about the story in flashback, however, is the way it is woven into the actual text of the play. A character starts with the first sentence of the text which arouses the interest of the audience. He then reveals the past in a flashback which gives the background to the story, introduces the characters, highlighting those aspects of their personality important to the play, and suggests the *aṅgīrasa*—the main *rasa* or aesthetic experience—of the play. The play does not start after the past in flashback, as is generally believed, but immediately with the entry of the first character. Thus the past in flashback, while not part of the actual text, is treated as a part of the performance.

The flashback is a popular device used by many playwrights all over the world. In Kūṭiyāṭṭam, this device has been used by directors over the centuries in a very dramatic and practical way. The events and episodes presented in the three stages of the past in flashback are selected by the director. A study and comparison of a few of these shows that different verses are prescribed for different plays or acts by the directors, who were also the authors of the stage manuals. This means that the director certainly chose those episodes and events for the performance that were important from the point of view of the main aesthetic experience and the charac-

terization of the major characters. Herein lies the skill of the director. Practically, the flashback device may have arisen as a solution for the problem of a lack of actors, and especially of actresses, which may have made the production of a whole play impossible. Thus the use of one act as a unit in itself, rather than the original complete play, and of the stylized flashback technique has influenced and molded the whole concept of this production style.

Another factor which sheds light on the role of the past in flashback in Kūṭiyāṭṭam is the manner in which the interlinking scenes (*praveśaka* and *viśkambhaka*) are dealt with.<sup>10</sup> In the usual Sanskrit drama each successive act begins with an interlinking scene that establishes the situation and often gives an exposition of actions which have occurred in the time intervening between the acts. In Kūṭiyāṭṭam, the performance of an act also starts with an interlinking scene. Of course, it does not serve its usual purpose as there is no need to connect two acts. Rather it gives the present situation, which creates interest in the audience, and provides a brief past in flashback to introduce the characters of the interlinking scene. After the enactment of the interlinking scene, the first character of the act begins the first sentence of his text which, as with the interlinking scene, creates interest. This is followed by his entry announcement and past in flashback. If the intention of the past in flashback was only to give the past story, then the logical sequence should have been the past story, the interlinking scene, which is the nearest past, and then the act. But that is not the case. The play or action in Kūṭiyāṭṭam starts from the present dramatic situation rather than the far past, and then, through flashback, suggests the specific past, introduces characters and the aesthetic experience (*rasa*) to follow, and connects this with the main story.

### *The Text of the Play*

The general pattern of the presentation of the major part of the actual text of the play is as follows. Before the text (a verse or prose dialogue) begins, a short introduction or preface to it is enacted without speech through gesture.<sup>11</sup> Then the text is recited with gestures and then again enacted only through gesture, which is often in the form of an elaboration or interpretation of the text. Next, the last one or two lines of the same text are repeated with speech and gesture to give continuity to the text. Since the elaboration continues for a long period, the other character (or characters), in-

cluding those to whom the text is addressed, exit, and return to take up their positions toward the end of the elaboration. As a result, even the character to whom the text is addressed is not present on the stage. This makes the whole practice seem like solo acting.

### *Last Rituals* (Muṭiyākittā)

The last section of the performance is *muṭiyākittā*,<sup>12</sup> the ritual(s) after the play is completed. The drummer plays a rhythm to announce that the stage is ready for the final bath (*avabhṛta*). The main actor, removing his headgear but keeping his headband on, comes on stage carrying holy water (*tīrthajala*) in a beaked vessel. He washes his feet and face and drinks from the water thrice (*ācamana*), then touches his ears, eyes, nose, chest, and head with a particular finger. He declares that he is performing the final bath, utters a sacred prayer while splashing water on his head and body, and then on the stage and audience. Then he takes one wick from the lamp and, describing a circle, invokes the gods. Next he drops the wick on the ground, salutes the gods (*abhivādana*), and asks atonement (*prāyaścitta*) for any mistake made by him or the troupe during the performance. The performance ends with his touching the stage.

## PERFORMING TECHNIQUES

### *Gestures and Body Acting* (Āṅgika Abhinaya)

A Kūṭiyāṭṭam performance, according to the tradition of Sanskrit drama, aims at evoking the proper aesthetic experience (*rasa*) in the audience. To suggest the proper emotions (*bhāva*) for the intended *rasa* is more important in Kūṭiyāṭṭam than telling a story. The elaboration of the text, the story in flashback, and all other such aspects contribute toward the suggestion of the proper emotion, and thus the *rasa*. The various types of acting—acting with the body (*āṅgika abhinaya*), intense acting with mind and body (*sāttvika*), speech (*vācika*), and costume and makeup (*dhārya*)—help to achieve this aim.

Unlike classical Sanskrit theater, gestures accompany all the words of the text in Kūṭiyāṭṭam. There are definite hand gestures for each word, even for suffixes, gender, and number. The introduction, interpretation, and elaboration of the text, which often

are very long, are acted out only through gestures. For detailed knowledge of hand gestures, the actors follow a manual called *hastalakṣaṇadīpikā*. The use of gestures for every word brings Kūṭiyāṭṭam closer to gestural dance (*nṛtya*) than to the pure drama form, which was probably the classical Sanskrit theater, where the sentence meaning, rather than each word, was enacted.

Facial expressions (*sāttvika abhinaya*) are very important in Kūṭiyāṭṭam in depicting different emotions. In fact, there are portions of a performance in Kūṭiyāṭṭam that are expressed only through facial expressions. One well-known scene is the depiction of verse 9, Act I from the play *Subhadrā and Dhanañjaya*, by playwright Kūlaśekhara Varman, in which the actor uses only facial expression, keeping his hands closed near his chest.

### *Speech Style (Vācika Abhinaya)*<sup>13</sup>

The style of speech in Kūṭiyāṭṭam is of a peculiar form—a sing-song, stylized form. It is not actually sung in any Karṇāṭakī (South Indian style) or Hindūstānī (North Indian style) melodies. It sounds more like the chanting of the *Vedas*. As no detailed study of this aspect of Kūṭiyāṭṭam has been done, we cannot say with certainty whether there is any deep similarity or influence of vedic chanting on the speech style of Kūṭiyāṭṭam. Indeed, if there is any, the problem is then to decide which school of vedic chanting has the closest similarity.

Actors divide the style of speech into twenty to twenty-four modes, calling them *rāga* or *svara*. There are traditional verses in Kūṭiyāṭṭam literature which describe the scope of these modes. For example, the mode *śrīkaṇṭhī* should be used at the end of an act. It should be employed in the killing of wicked characters, for worship (*bhakti*), and for the description of evening and noon.<sup>14</sup> Generally, stage manuals indicate which mode an actor should use for each section of speech. Thus, Vālin, after being shot by Rāma's arrow, is supposed to use the *dukhagāndhāra* mode according to the stage manual of the "Slaying of Vālin." The technique of performing these modes of speech is handed down through oral practice. This has resulted in its becoming vague and inexact.

### *Music*

As far as music is concerned, Kūṭiyāṭṭam is not very complicated, especially in comparison with other South Indian dance dramas

such as Kathakali or Bhāgavathamelā. The main instruments which provide accompaniment are: (1) a pot-drum (*mizhāvu*); a big pot with a piece of leather stretched tight and tied across its mouth. Generally, it is about thirty-six inches high and about twenty-six inches in diameter at its widest point. This drum is held in a vertical position by a stand located between the two doors of the green room. (2) Cymbals (*kuzhittālam*); these are used by the female singer for keeping the beat whenever rhythm is played. (3) Conch (*śaṅkhu*); this is considered an auspicious instrument and a sign of royalty. It is sounded in the background when important personages appear on the stage. (4) *Idakka*; this is an hourglass shaped percussion instrument. When played, the tension of the strings is adjusted with one hand and the drumming is done with a stick held in the other hand. (5) *Kuzhal* or *kurum kuzhal*; this instrument is a kind of oboe, practically the same as the *śehanai* of the North or the *mukhavīṇā* of the South. It is the only instrument which provides melody in Kūṭiyāṭṭam.<sup>18</sup>

All these instruments, though in changed forms, can be identified with instruments mentioned in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata. The major difference between the orchestra described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and that of Kūṭiyāṭṭam is the absence of stringed instruments (*vīṇā*) in the latter, which are listed as the main instruments in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

Generally, rhythm is more prominent than melody in Kūṭiyāṭṭam. The *kuzhal* player does not play any specific melodies, and it is surprising that there are no rules linking the playing of the *kuzhal* with either the melody of the speech or the *rasa* of the play. The *kuzhal* player may play whatever he likes. Generally, there are two pot-drums. The main drummer plays a complicated rhythm while the other player keeps the beat. When the main drummer needs a rest, the other player will take over. As the pot-drum is only a piece of leather stretched over the mouth of a pot and played with the palms, it is obvious that not many tonal variations are possible. Still, different rhythm patterns are played on it with different drum syllables—for example, *tarhā ki tarhā ki tarhā ki threm*, *kitintā kiti kiti kiti kitintā*. Besides the pot-drum, rhythm is also provided through the *idakka* and cymbals. On the *idakka*, notes covering nearly two octaves can be produced by manipulation of the tense strings. Thus this instrument is a good accompaniment for Kūṭiyāṭṭam, but the volume produced is very low and it

is not very audible amid the sound of the pot-drum and *kuzhal*. The female singer sitting on the stage plays the cymbals, through which she keeps the beat. She also provides the vocal support needed during the performance, sings prayer verses (*akkittā śloka*) during the duet (*goṣṭhi*), various verses accompanying pure dance in preplay activities, verses for all the flashbacks, and recites the parts of female characters when they are not present on stage.

The rhythm is played throughout the performance except during speeches. Before starting a speech the actor gives a signal (*viḷakkuka*) to the musicians to stop the music. As soon as the speech is finished the rhythm starts again and accompanies the gestural interpretation. The rhythm follows the actions of the character in certain set scenes, such as set movements to establish characters (*sthāyin* and *stobha*), and fight scenes. Otherwise the actor follows the rhythm played on the pot-drum through his actions. During the preplay activities, when dance is being performed, rhythm dominates. In fact there are sets of pure dance steps (*nṛtta*) according to which the rhythm is played. Expressional or descriptive parts, like a description of Lord Śiva and Parvati, are improvised in time with the rhythm. The verses during the duet (*goṣṭhi*), the gestural interpretation (*nityakriyā*), and the past in flashback (*nirvahaṇa*) are recited according to their meter, as is the first benedictory verse provided by the stage manager (*nāṇḍi-sūtradhāra*), or the drummer.

## STAGING

### *Temple Theaters* (Kūṭambalam)<sup>10</sup>

As we have seen before, Kūṭiyāṭṭam is linked to the temples. All the major temples of Kerala have temple theaters, which are called *kūṭambalam*. These theaters are built in the courtyards on the right side of the deity. Most are rectangular and have three main parts—the roof, the main body, and the stone base (*adhiṣṭhāna*) on which the other two rest. These theaters are of three sizes; large, as at Trichur; medium, as at Irīñjalakuda; and small, as at Guruvāyūr temple. The shape of the roof, and thus of the whole theater, is like that of a cave. Generally, the auditorium is on one level, but sometimes the center portion is raised a few inches to separate a special seating area for the higher class. There are two rows of large pillars on either side of the auditorium, which has



four doors. The front and back doors are used by actors; the two side doors by the audience, one each for men and women. The surface of the ceiling is broken up in uneven ornamental sections which improves acoustic quality. The outside walls of the auditorium, which are very short due to the low roof, are made of wood slats.

The stage is a raised platform at one end of the auditorium surrounded on three sides by a seating area for the audience. The stage is square and has a roof supported by one or three pillars in each corner. Thus there is a roof within the main roof of the theater. The ceiling of the stage is highly ornamented with carvings of figures of the different deities of the eight directions. The back wall of the stage has two doors which connect the stage with the green room and are used by the actors for entries and exits. Between the two doors to the green room, two brackets of wood slats are kept for the pot-drums behind which there are two seats for the players. A big oil lamp made of brass is permanently kept downstage center and is lighted with three wicks at the time of the performance—two wicks toward the actors and one toward the audience. A white cloth is spread center stage right for the female singer to sit on, and in front of it is a white cloth on which the cymbals are placed. Downstage left is a stool (*ptḍha*) which is used for a variety of purposes.

### *Settings and Props*

As general decoration for the stage, the pillars are covered with unbleached cloth; the four corner pillars are decorated with banana trees laden with fruit and a flower. A decorative arch made from coconut or palm leaves is hung from the ceiling on the sides of the stage facing the audience. Mango leaves and small bananas can also be used in making the decorative arch. The lamp and pot-drums are also covered with unbleached cloth. A measureful of unmilled rice and a coconut flower are kept beside the lamp, along with the eight auspicious items. The eight auspicious items vary according to the performance to follow. For example, a mirror and two twisted saris should be included among them in certain performances of the entry announcement of a female character.

Instructions for stage decoration are given in the stage manuals. In the stage manual of the *Wonderful Crest Jewel*, edited by K. P. Narayana Pisharoti, instructions are given in the beginning,

along with the entry announcement section, as to decoration and the final distribution of the things used for it. For example, the stage manual says that the cloth around the right back pillar should be given to the drummer, as he stands near that during his speech. The cloths covering the pot-drum and the measureful of rice should also be given to the drummer. The cloth on which the eight auspicious things are kept should go to the female singer, and so on.<sup>17</sup>

There are no settings as such used in Kūṭiyāṭṭam. Also no front curtain is used. However, a hand curtain of red cloth, carried by two stagehands, is the single most important stage device in Kūṭiyāṭṭam. It serves the purpose of a main curtain, as most of the characters enter behind it. A change of scene is indicated by the holding of this curtain on the stage. It also serves other purposes, such as simplifying the depiction of many situations which cannot otherwise be shown without lighting tricks and a main curtain. For example, it is used when a character should be shown on the stage already seated (according to the stage directions in Sanskrit plays, a character enters seated), engaged in some other work, or falling from the sky. In such situations, this curtain is used very effectively, for behind it the needed arrangements are made and the proper positions are taken by the characters. The red curtain is also used as a setting especially to show a change of location. In the performance of the "Slaying of Vālin," a change of location from a forest to the main entrance of the city of Kiskindha is shown by bringing the red curtain on stage and holding it in front of the pot-drums.<sup>18</sup>

Like the red curtain, a small stool, ordinarily kept downstage left, also plays an important role. It has a multitude of uses during performances. Basically it is used as a seat; in court scenes it becomes a throne, in a forest scene a stone seat. During flashbacks its presence becomes essential, as actors generally perform these in a sitting position. It is also used to show a different level, as in the third act of the *Wonderful Crest Jewel* where Rāvaṇa, Sītā, and the charioteer stand on stools to show that they are traveling in the air, and as in the play *Subhadra and Dhanañjaya* where Subhadra, falling from the sky, is portrayed by an actor standing on a stool behind the red curtain. In situations where more than one character is shown on the same high level, as in the previous example from the *Wonderful Crest Jewel*, more stools are brought on the

stage. Sometimes a platform is used instead of a stool to suggest a different level, as in the "Slaying of Jaṭāyus" from the *Wonderful Crest Jewel*.

The stool is also employed with dramatic effect in different situations. I would like to mention here three uses in the "Slaying of Vālin" from the play *Consecration*.<sup>19</sup> (1) According to the text, Vālin enters with his wife, Tārā, who is clinging to his clothes. In Kūṭiyāṭṭam, Tārā does not actually come on the stage at all. Her part is either played by Vālin or sung by the female singer. To show her presence, the stool is covered before the entry of Vālin with a white cloth of which one end is kept loose. During the conversation between Vālin and Tārā (without Tārā's being on the stage) the loose end is kept hanging, and after the supposed exit of Tārā it is tucked away. (2) During the fight between Vālin and Sugrīva, Vālin manages to throw Sugrīva to the ground and puts the stool on him to suggest that he has put a mountain on Sugrīva. Lakṣmaṇa, who comes to rescue Sugrīva, takes it off him, the whole action looking very dramatic. (3) After Vālin is wounded by the arrow of Rāma, he is supported by Sugrīva but is unable to stand or sit. At the same time he cannot be completely flat on his back while performing his remaining lines because they will not be projected to the audience. The ideal position for him is a half-seated one, and so a stool is used to give him the back support necessary for this position.

In Kūṭiyāṭṭam only a few stylized stage properties are used, and they are used in a suggestive rather than a realistic style. Some of the props which are generally employed are a sword, a bow and arrow, banana leaves for the jester's comic scenes, and branches for fights between two monkeys. Two hand lamps are also kept in front of noble or powerful characters at the time of their entries. Some parts of the costume, especially the loose ends of the upper scarf, are also used very effectively as props.

Generally, there are no settings used in Kūṭiyāṭṭam, however, there are a few exceptions where scenes are presented with some settings and props to create a realistic impression.<sup>20</sup> For example, in the dream scene of the play *The Vision of Vāsavadattā* by Bhāsa, things like a mattress, pillow, garland, lamp, pot of water, sandalwood paste, camphor, and so on are used to create an effective scene. The second act of the *Delight of Snakes*, where the heroine tries to commit suicide by hanging herself, is acted out in the

following way. A fairly long piece of cloth is twisted round with a noose at one end, the other end being fixed to the ceiling. The character stands on a stool, inserts her neck in the noose, and then the stool is removed and the heroine rushes down in a giddy whirl. A few other scenes which have incidents like a bird flying in the sky (*Delight of Snakes*), or the heroine swept along by a river (*Tapati and Samvarana*), or Gaurī riding on an elephant (*Delight of Snakes*) were, as tradition says, acted in a realistic way or in a way which could create a realistic impression.

### *Makeup and Costume*

The stage manuals describe and give instructions for the makeup and costume of characters. On the basis of these details, it can be said that makeup and costume in Kūṭiyāṭṭam are stylized and that they represent characters more as types than as individuals. A color scheme is worked out to emphasize the different types of characters according to their mental set.

Heroes are usually painted either a green or red color, and thus are either *pacca* (green) or *pazhuppu* (red) characters. *Pacca* characters have basically green faces with red lips and black eyes and brows. They wear an elaborate white paste or paper frame, a *cutṭi*, which extends down in a curve from the cheekbones and the sides of the jaw to join at the chin. *Pazhuppu* characters have the same style of makeup, with a red face and lips painted black. The stage manager is painted red.

Haughty characters, like Rāvaṇa, having some noble characteristics, have basically a green face, like a *pacca*, but with the addition of red and white, in the form of a red-white stylized mustache which extends from cheek to cheek. Also, a red and white design is painted on the nose and between the eyes, and spreads out upon the forehead in a knife-shaped design over each eyebrow. Thus their name, *kattī*, which means knife. A white knob is attached to the nose of these characters and they wear a *cutṭi* similar to that of the *pacca* characters.

The *kari*, or black type, including characters such as demons, are painted entirely black, with white marks on the forehead and cheeks, and red lips. Another type, *taṭṭi*, is named according to the color of their beards. Animal characters are included among this type, which is divided into two subcategories: characters who are good but egocentric are red-bearded; those who are kind and

devoted are white-bearded. For example, Vālin is red-bearded, whereas Hanumat is white-bearded.

All characters have different kinds of marks on their forehead, and except for the black characters, their legs are painted with white paste. The jester (*vidūṣaka*) has a completely different make-up. His face, arms, and chest are painted with white paste; brown dots are then applied to his body—one each to his forehead, cheeks, and chin, two to his arms and chest. His eyes and brows are painted black. Female characters and others, like sages, have simple makeup. Others, like Jaṭāyus, Hanumat, Kāpāli, and Śūrpaṇakhā (after her nose, ears, and breast have been cut off by Lakṣmaṇa) have special makeup. The ingredients that are used for makeup are basically rice powder, red arsenic, vermilion (*cāyilyam*), turmeric powder, indigo, mica powder, red *tecci* flower, *nonhana* grass, the thread of banana stem, bamboo sticks, cork, lime, and coconut oil.

In contrast to the use of makeup, costumes, with few exceptions, are the same for all the male characters. The jacketlike upper garment (*kupayam*) is made of red and black striped cloth. It has long sleeves and is tied at the back. The lower garment (*poṇṇaṭṭam*) is actually two pieces of white cloth which hang from the hips down to the feet. It generally has black and red stripes near the lower end. An undergarment (*kopinai*), a piece of white cloth wrapped tightly from the waist to the knee, is worn under the *poṇṇaṭṭam*. A *mattam*, a folded garment with frills, is worn at the back of the waist. An upper scarf, *uttariya*, whose two ends are tied to resemble lotus flowers, is worn either on the shoulder or on the waist, according to the situation. In fact, this scarf is employed very effectively for varied purposes. For example, it is used to show the conventional change from one character to another, or different emotions like anger (*krodha*), firmness (*utsāha*), or power. The jester does not wear the jacketlike upper garment. Instead, his arms and chest are painted with white paste. Hanumat has a special upper garment made of white wool.

Like costumes, the ornaments worn are similar for most of the characters except for a few, such as the jester. The ornaments do not distinguish different “types” of characters as does makeup. It should be noted, however, that the headgear is of different varieties and represents different types. The ritualistic importance of one of the headbands, the *coppuṭṭin*, which the actor wears immedi-

ately after his purification rites and before he starts his makeup, should also be mentioned here. It is believed that once this head-band is tied on, the actor will not be affected by pollution of any kind. Once it is on, the actor should not remove it, whatever happens, until the performance is over and the last rite performed.

### *Lighting Arrangement*

This is an interesting aspect of Kūṭiyāṭṭam which reflects on the production style itself. In Kūṭiyāṭṭam, lighting is provided entirely by the oil lamp which is kept downstage center. Thus the actor generally takes his position in the center of the stage a little to the left or right so as to be in the lighted area. If there are two characters on the stage, the important one takes his place center stage. But if a secondary character has an important piece of acting, the main character leaves the stage in order to allow the secondary character the central position. When a powerful or important character enters, one or two small oil lamps, attached to a steel rod(s), are held in front of him, supposedly to show respect but possibly to provide more light. Thus lighting influences the blocking on the stage. As the ideal situation would be to have only one or two characters simultaneously on the stage, the lighting reinforces the tendency toward solo acting, thus affecting the entire style of production.

### *Conventions*

Kūṭiyāṭṭam, being a stylized production technique, has some very interesting conventions. To avoid a crowd of actors, or possibly because of the scarcity of actors, minor characters are not always presented on the stage but are represented in the following ways. The minor character is performed by an actor already present on the stage who is playing an important character. This change of characters is established through a symbolic change in costume and basic posture. The text of the minor character is presented through gesticulation and recitation. If the change of characters is from male to female, the text is presented through gestures but without its recitation. For example, in the second act of the *Wonderful Crest Jewel*, the character of Sītā is not presented on the stage. The actor playing Rāma assumes her role through a symbolic change in his costume—by tucking the right loose end of his lower garment at the waist, and by taking a posture representing a

female character. He then gesticulates her dialogues without reciting them. The change in the costume for a shift of characters from male to male is shown by altering the style of the upper scarf and the lower garment. The illusion of the presence of a minor character is created and maintained by establishing his definite position on the stage. For example, an actor portraying Rāma establishes that Sītā (who is not present on the stage) is sitting on his left by directing all of his acting to his left; when he “becomes” Sītā, he turns toward the right.

An alternative way of presenting minor characters, especially female characters, has the female singer singing the part of the character who is absent. The character who is present on the stage acts as if he is listening to the other character. After the supposed speech of the female character, the major character continues his part. In this method, gesticulation of the minor character’s part is completely absent. A third and very different way of presenting a minor character involves covering an actor with a red cloth so that there is no need for makeup or costuming. He comes on the stage and stands just near the pot-drums. There he recites his dialogues and then makes his exit. Here only speech is used; gesticulation, makeup, and costuming are not. An example of this is the character of Aṅgada in the act “Slaying of Vālin” from *Consecration*, according to the stage manual of Pynkulam Raman Cakyar. A fourth method is used during the past in flashback. The actor, while narrating the past stories, assumes other roles by taking on the basic posture (*sthāyin*) of the other characters. He then acts the speech as if he were quoting someone. This is made clear by his adding, “Is that what you are saying?” at the end of the dialogue.

There are some conventional descriptions in Kūṭiyāṭṭam such as those of a mountain, a forest, the holding up of the Kailāsa mountain, and so on. These descriptions are worked out with set details and whenever the need for them arises, they are fitted in. For example, falling in love is always indicated by a description of five parts of the other person’s body. In the same way, fight scenes are always conventionalized and performed with a specific rhythm. The steps and movements for establishing the basic nature of characters (*sthāyin* and *stobha*) are well defined and conventionally set. These are done by each actor according to his character immediately after his first appearance. Situations such as falling from the sky, traveling in the air, traveling long distances, and transforming

to and from disguised forms are enacted through conventionalized actions. The audience is usually aware of these conventions, and thus presentation of such complicated situations is possible.

### *Stage Composition*

The two back doors in the wall of the green room are used for entry and exit. A character always enters from the left door and exits by the right. Generally, the main character takes his position with regard to the position of the lamp, that is, center stage. Other characters take their positions either to the left or to the right of the main character. Minor, subordinate, and female characters should take their positions to the left of the main character. Even when a minor character is not actually present on the stage, his or her presence is established to the left of the main character. A third door at the back of the auditorium is used in some scenes for dramatic entries. The character may enter from that door, walk through the auditorium and onto the stage. This is used very effectively for Śūrpaṇakhā's entry in the second act of *Wonderful Crest Jewel* when she appears deformed and bleeding.

## TEXT

Generally, the performance follows the texts of the original Sanskrit play word for word. The few changes that are made by the actors are to be found in the stage manuals. Whenever the stage manuals have made such changes, I have found that they make the play more dramatic. For example, in the "Slaying of Jaṭāyus" (the fourth act of *Wonderful Crest Jewel*), Jaṭāyus' entry is postponed for one verse so as to make it more dramatic. According to the text of the play, Jaṭāyus enters before verse 11—which describes how he is going to fight with Rāvaṇa—and then recites it. This is followed by the charioteer's dialogue in which he says that Jaṭāyus is running toward them. According to the stage manuals,<sup>21</sup> Jaṭāyus is still on another level (or in another location) while reciting verse 11. The stage manual then has the charioteer recite his dialogue while Jaṭāyus runs toward them. This change makes the text of the play more dramatic and consistent in action.

Another change is in the third act of the same play. When Rāvaṇa, disguised as Rāma, and the charioteer, disguised as Lakṣmaṇa, come to abduct Sītā, the charioteer's dialogue according to



the text is: *prastatv āryaḥ ratham ārohatv āryaḥ sapatnīkaḥ* ("Be pleased Brother. Get into this chariot along with your wife."). Here the stage manual<sup>22</sup> suggests that the charioteer should recite *prastatv āyusmān* ("Be pleased master."), instead of *prastatv āryaḥ*, then show confusion and correct himself by saying *prastatv āryaḥ*. This change is quite important. Usually the charioteer addresses Rāvaṇa as master (*āyusmān*). But here he is disguised as Lakṣmaṇa, the younger brother of Rāma. Thus he should use the address "brother" (*āryaḥ*) for Rāvaṇa, who is disguised as Rāma, to maintain consistency with their disguised forms. According to the stage manual's suggestion, the charioteer should act as if he forgets his disguise and, according to his old habit, addresses Rāvaṇa as master. Then, confused, he should realize his mistake and correct the address from master to brother. This addition to the text makes the situation more convincing, interesting, and much more dramatic.

The third example of a change in the text of the play, which is probably made to make a situation more visually effective, occurs in the second act of the same play. According to the text, Lakṣmaṇa cuts off Śūrpaṇakhā's nose and ears while fighting with her (Act II, v. 13). (This is also according to the original story in the *Rāmāyaṇa*.) In Kūṭiyāṭṭam, the cutting off of her breast is added. Thus Śūrpaṇakhā appears on the stage bleeding, with her nose, ears, and breast cut, providing more visual impact. Śūrpaṇakhā enters at the back door of the auditorium, surrounded by burning torches, and then proceeds through the audience onto the stage. This was one of the most impressive scenes we saw in Kūṭiyāṭṭam, as performed by Raman Cakyar and his troupe.

There are some other aspects of the production of Kūṭiyāṭṭam which also change the original text of the play. We have already seen the addition of the past in flashback which may be, basically, the result of the need to introduce the past story to maintain a link, especially in the case when acts are selected from the middle of a play. Also, the addition of local language in the performance of Kūṭiyāṭṭam (discussed below) changes the form of the original text noticeably.

Local language (Malayāḷam) has been added to the plays from the time of Kūḷaśekhara Varman to comment upon the action of the play as well as to add contemporary color to it. By the

time of the Kūṭiyāṭṭam tradition, the Sanskrit language had ceased to be understood by the common people, and thus local language must have been added to interpret and explain the Sanskrit text. This is done mainly through the drummer and the character of the jester. The drummer, who acts as the stage manager (*nāndī-sūtra-dhara*), comments on and explains the Sanskrit text in the local language at the beginning and sometimes during the play. In the past this was done in many of the plays, however, today this practice has remained only for the act "Presentation of the Ring" from the play *Wonderful Crest Jewel*.

The most important source for the presentation of the local language is the character of the jester. As in the Sanskrit tradition, the jester brings comic relief to the play. But in Kūṭiyāṭṭam, in addition to this role, his job is to comment upon the various aspects of current problems. He has the liberty to comment on anything. Generally, in his flashback stories he presents the four goals of life (*puruṣārtha*) with wit and humor. The jester also takes this opportunity to comment upon current social and political problems, weaving them into the exposition of the goals of life. While doing this he uses the local language without accompanying gestures. Speech is the main tool of the jester along with mimicry and a realistic style of acting. When the text begins after the flashback, the jester recites his dialogue in Sanskrit according to the text. He also does this without gesticulation and then interprets and elaborates his dialogue using the local language, that is, Malayāḷam. Thus the jester plays an important part in Kūṭiyāṭṭam. But this can happen only in those plays in which he appears. Characters such as Śūrpaṇakhā also use Malayāḷam for the introduction of their characters and for their part in flashback. In such cases, the language is spoken in an artificial voice.

With all its remarkable characteristics, which have been briefly described in this chapter, Kūṭiyāṭṭam possesses a unique production style. Because it is the only surviving tradition of producing the original Sanskrit plays, it is also significant for the study of how Sanskrit plays may have been produced in ancient times. As is well known, the first available treatise on dramaṭurgy, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata, written about the second century A.D., listed from existing practice all the elements necessary for the production of a play. Because of the lack of continuous practice, how-

ever, it has become very difficult to understand many of the technical terms used in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Through a study of the technical terms of Kūṭiyāṭṭam, and of their execution, one can gain a valuable insight into the interpretation of many technical terms in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Thus if we could eliminate the circumstantial characteristics from the living practice we would reach a better understanding of the ancient style.<sup>23</sup>

## Notes

1. See also the opening paper, "Kūṭiyāṭṭam; Its Form and Significance as Sanskrit Drama," read by V. Raghavan at the Kūṭiyāṭṭam Seminar organized by the Kerala Mandalam and the American Institute of Indian Studies, 1966. This was subsequently published in *Samskrita Ranga Annual* 5 (1966-1967). Raghavan shows the similarities in the nomenclature of *rāgas* with the *devārām* music tradition in Tamil of the same period (p. 80).
2. Madhav Cakyar, in "Lineages of Cakyar and Nampyar Families," Kūṭiyāṭṭam Seminar paper, 1966.
3. In "Aṭṭaprakāram and Kramadīpikā," Kūṭiyāṭṭam Seminar paper, 1966.
4. Mentioned by Manimadhav Cakyar in his then (1973) unpublished manuscript, *Nāṭyakalpadruma*.
5. Narayana Pisharoti, "Aṭṭaprakāram and Kramadīpikā," Kūṭiyāṭṭam Seminar paper.
6. The description given here is based on the *kramadīpikā* of the play *Āścaryacūḍāmaṇi* (ed. N. Pisharoti), Manimadhav Cakyar's *Nāṭyakalpadruma*, and the performance I witnessed.
7. For the actual verses, see the article "Kūṭiyāṭṭam: The Staging of Sanskrit Plays in the Traditional Kerala Theatre," by K. Kunjunni Raja, published in the *Samskrita Ranga Annual* 2 (1959-1960):24.
8. For the verse, see *ibid.*, p. 25.
9. This information is based on the unpublished *kramadīpikā* of *Balivadhānka* used by Pynkulam Raman Cakyar, and on the observation of its performance.
10. Based on an interview with Manimadhav Cakyar, the well-known exponent of this art.
11. Here is an example of the introduction of verse 5 of the first act of *Āścaryacūḍāmaṇi* (*Wonderful Crest Jewel*) from its *aṭṭaprakāra*. A translation of the first two lines of the verse is: "I am driving away by the sound of my bow the wild animals living nearby, creating fear. I am making a hut with leaves, beds with the petals of flowers." A free translation of the *aṭṭaprakāra* for the introduction of this verse is:

Lakṣmaṇa stands in a pose of respect to Śrī Rāma and thinks, "What did Brother tell me? He told me to make a hut [*parṇaśālā*]." Lakṣmaṇa walks in *kalapuratta* [jumping in three corners and waving his leg and turning] and then turning [*parikramya*] takes his bow and arrow. Then he takes up position before the lamp and looking sideways says, "I am

going to do the following in this manner." Then he tightens his head-dress, gets ready [tightens the waistband] and strings the bow and makes the sound. Listening to the bow-sound, animals on the banks of the river Godavari and in the forest area become frightened and run. He asks, "How is that?" Now he describes the different animals and their reactions. When elephants were standing, flapping their ears, they heard this bow-sound and became frightened. Then he shows the elephants and runs. In the same way he shows the reactions of other animals. Then he builds a house, asking, "In what manner did he build the house?" He acts cutting branches with his sword and making pillars, beams, and a roof tied together with creepers. He also makes beds with flowers and then pillows.

12. This information is derived from Manimadhav Cakyar's unpublished manuscript, *Nāṭyakalpadruma*, and from seeing the actual performance.

13. For this and the section on music, see L. S. Rajagopalan, "Music in Kootiyattam," *Sangeet Natak* 10 (October–December 1968).

14. See *ibid.*

*anāvāsāne śrīkaṇṭhī duṣṭānām api himsane/  
sandhyāvāṇanav jāyāṁ madhyāhnasya ca vāṇane//  
bhaktibhāve ca vidvadbhiḥ kathyate gītāpāragath/*

15. For the arrangement of the orchestra, see the section on the theater (*kūṭambalam*).

16. This information is based on the article by Govardhan Panchal, "Kootampalam: Sanskrit Stage of Kerala," *Sangeet Natak* 8 (April–June 1968), and on personal observations of the *kūṭambalam* in the temple of Trichur.

17. See Narayana Pisharoti, ed., the *Kramadīpikā* of the play *Āścaryacūḍamaṇi*.

18. This is according to the unpublished *kramadīpikā* of *Balivadhāṅka* used by Pynkulam Raman Cakyar.

19. From the observation of the *Balivadhāṅka* performed by Raman Cakyar.

20. Manimadhav Cakyar, *Nāṭyakalpadruma*.

21. Pisharoti, *Āścaryacūḍamaṇi*.

22. *Ibid.*

23. This is the subject of my doctoral dissertation, "The Style of Producing Plays in Ancient Indian Theatre" (University of Toronto).

# Selected Glossary

Abhinavagupta	A commentator on Bharata's <i>Nāṭyaśāstra</i> (late tenth and early eleventh centuries).
<i>abhinaya</i>	Acting; acting to express. Literally, <i>abhi</i> means toward and <i>ni</i> means to lead. <i>Abhinaya</i> is that which leads or carries toward. As a technical term in dramaturgy it covers everything that an actor does and uses on stage in order to convey the meaning of the play to the spectators and evoke a joyful consciousness in them. It has four dimensions or elements: <i>āhārya</i> , <i>āṅgika</i> , <i>sāttvika</i> , and <i>vācika</i> . In dance terminology, indicates mime.
<i>āhārya abhinaya</i>	That aspect of acting involving accessories such as hand and stage properties, costumes, makeup, and decor.
<i>alamkāra</i>	Decoration, embellishment, ornament.
<i>alīḍha</i>	A pose used for the release of arrows or missiles; used as a stylized posture in dance and sculpture.
<i>aṅgaracanā</i>	Makeup.
<i>aṅghāra</i>	A long sequence of movement.

<i>āṅgika abhinaya</i>	A term for movements of the body; one of the four dimensions of acting; acting through bodily movements.
Aṅkiya Nāṭ	A form of devotional theater in Assam.
<i>anubhāva</i>	The total impact of acting.
<i>ārabhaṭṭ</i>	A particular style of theatrical presentation characterized by grand, violent movements.
<i>artha</i>	Welfare; one of the three aims and/or spheres of human existence.
<i>arthopakṣepaka</i>	Linking devices used in ancient Sanskrit drama for making its structure compact and complete. Basically a device to provide exposition of offstage action.
<i>aṭṭaparakāra</i>	One of two types of stage manuals in Kūṭiyāṭṭam handed down from generation to generation and used in preparing performances of Sanskrit plays.
<i>bhakti</i>	Worship or devotion.
Bharata (or Bharata-muni)	Reputed author of the <i>Nāṭyaśāstra</i> .
<i>bhāratt</i>	A particular style of theatrical presentation in which the word predominates (see <i>vṛtti</i> ).
Bhāsa	A major early Sanskrit playwright (ca. 450 B.C.); author of <i>The Vision of Vāsavadattā</i> . He is celebrated for his humanism, characterization, and simple lucid style.
<i>bhava</i>	Emotion, mental state; emotional disposition.
Bhavāi	A form of rural theater in Gujarat.
Brahman (or Brahmin)	A person of the priestly caste.

<b>Brāhmaṇas</b>	Exegetical texts. Each of the vedic schools has such texts explaining the meaning of the respective <i>Veda</i> and intricate ritualistic procedures connected with officiating at a vedic sacrifice. They date from ca. 800 B.C.
<b>cākyār</b>	The hereditary subcaste of actors in Kerala who perform classical Sanskrit plays in the Kūṭiyāṭṭam tradition.
<b>cāri</b>	A primary unit of movement denoting a particular manner of covering space.
<b>cārin</b>	"Steps," poses.
<b>Cārudatta</b>	Central character of <i>The Little Clay Cart</i> .
<b>caturśramadhya</b>	The medium-sized, square theater structure with square acting area.
<b>Chhau</b>	A masked dance-drama form in Orissa (Mayurabhanja), Bihar, and West Bengal.
<b>Daśarūpaka</b>	A manual of dramaturgy that reduces materials found in the <i>Nāṭyaśāstra</i> to a brief, simplified form.
<b>dharma</b>	Righteousness; virtue, the principal one of the three aims and/or spheres of human existence.
<b>dhruvā</b>	An interpolated song in a drama.
<b>dhvani</b>	Suggestions; a literary device.
<b>dūtī</b>	Messenger; a stock character in Sanskrit plays.
<b>Duṣyanta</b>	The hero-king of <i>Śākuntala</i> .
<b>gaṅgāvataranākaraṇa</b>	A cadence of movement literally meaning the descent of the river Gaṅgā (Ganges).
<b>gati</b>	"Walking," or gait; used as a technical term for different types of gaits—of birds, animals,

and humans. One of the conventional acting techniques.

*goṣṭhi*

A duet between drummers and singers in the preplay activities of Kūṭiyāṭṭam.

*gulma*

A mass or lump, denoting a choreographic pattern of a cluster formation closest to the center of the circle.

*hariṇipluta*

"Jump of a deer"; the name of a cadence of movement.

*hasta* (also *mudra*)

Hand poses.

*jarjara*

Lord Indra's flagpole; used for ritual purposes in the preliminary activities of Sanskrit productions; carried by the stage manager (*sūtra-dhāra*) when he first enters the stage.

*Jātra*

A form of rural theater popular in Bengal.

*javanikā*

A rectangular curtain carried on and off the stage by stage assistants in order to facilitate the entrances and exits of characters.

*kaiśiki*

A particular style of performance in which music and dance predominate (see *vṛtti*).

*kakṣyāvibhāga*

Division of the acting area of the stage into different zones, usually squares. The ancient theatrical convention of zonal divisions established by the movements and usages of the actors helped to maintain continuity of action despite changes in locale in the same act of the play.

*Kalidasa*

Author of *Śakuntala*; one of the great playwrights of ancient India. His dates are uncertain but some scholars place him in the first century B.C.

*kāma*

Love; one of the three aims and/or spheres of human existence.



<i>kāma śṛṅgāra</i>	Romantic love.
<i>karāṇa</i>	A cadence of movement made up of an initial static position, a movement in space, and a final pose. There are 108 such cadences.
Karṇāṭaki (Karnatic)	South Indian.
<i>kārya</i>	Dramatic action.
<i>kaṭakāmukha</i>	A hand gesture in which the index finger, middle finger, and thumb meet and the other two fingers are open at right angles to these three.
Kathakali	A traditional form of dance drama in Kerala. It is said to have evolved from Kūṭiyāṭṭam via Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam.
<i>kramadīpikā</i>	One of two types of stage manuals in Kūṭiyāṭṭam handed down from generation to generation and used in preparing performances of Sanskrit plays.
Kṛṣṇa	An earthly incarnation of the god Viṣṇu; a king and object of religious devotion.
Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam	A form of dance drama preserved in Guruvāyūr Temple in Kerala.
Kuchipudi	A traditional dramatic form practiced in Andhra Pradesh.
<i>kūṭambalam</i>	Theater structures attached to temples in Kerala and designed for performances of Kūṭiyāṭṭam.
<i>kutapa</i>	Orchestra accompanying the actors in the ancient Indian theater.
Kūṭiyāṭṭam	The oldest surviving traditional theater form of Kerala (ca. tenth or eleventh century A.D.). Its performances of Sanskrit plays suggest linkage with the ancient Indian theater tradition.

<i>lokadharmī</i>	The naturalistic or realistic theatrical convention or style of production, where it is permissible to be representational and to use props.
Magadha	An ancient Indian state covering the southern part of Bihar. It gave rise to many ancient empires, including that of the Mauryas.
Maitreya	The jester of <i>The Little Clay Cart</i> .
<i>maṇḍala</i>	A technical term used in many contexts, but especially the motif of the circle. In dance it is a static position, akin to the <i>grand pli��</i> of Western classical ballet.
<i>mattav��ra��i</i>	A term used in the <i>N��t��ya��s��stra</i> with reference to the stage.
<i>mudr��</i>	See <i>hasta</i> .
<i>n��nd��-s��tradh��ra</i>	The stage manager who recites the benediction. In <i>K���tiy�����am</i> this part is played by the main drummer, or <i>n��mby��r</i> .
<i>na���a</i>	An actor.
<i>Na���a S��tra</i>	A work on dramaturgy by P����ni, probably composed ca. 600 B.C. Although it has not survived, it is referred to by later dramaturgists.
<i>n���aka</i>	One of the most complex major dramatic forms evolved by the ancient Indian theater. A <i>n���aka</i> is based on a well-known story, has five to ten acts, and most of the dramatic devices, styles, tendencies, and usages are integrated in its structure.
<i>n���ya</i>	Drama; theater, the art of it. Whatever pertains to the art of theater.
<i>n���yadharm��</i>	The abstract, stylized theatrical convention or style of production where suggestive gesture replaces props or other aids.

<i>nāyaka</i>	The hero; a category of male characters in Sanskrit plays.
<i>nityakriyā</i>	A set of dance movements and gestural interpretation done in preplay activities in Kuṭiyāṭam.
<i>nṛtta</i>	Pure, abstract dance movements that do not interpret the word.
<i>nṛtya</i>	Rhythmic dance movements with gestures in which mime is presented in relation to the words of the song.
<i>parikramaṇa</i>	“Walking around”; one of the conventional acting techniques in which the actor suggests a journey from one locale to another, within the same scene, through a stylized walk around the stage.
<i>parivartana</i>	“Circumambulation”; name of a section of the preliminaries of a play.
<i>prahasana</i>	A comedy or farce.
<i>prakaraṇa</i>	One of the major dramatic forms in which the playwright invents a plot around a hero belonging to the middle class.
<i>praveśaka</i>	Connecting scenes used only between two acts for giving information about events that occurred during the period that separates the two acts. (In <i>The Vision of Vāsavadattā</i> such scenes come before Acts II, IV, and V).
<i>pravṛtti</i>	Technical term which takes cognizance of the diversity of regional variations and usages; local usages.
<i>pūjā</i>	Religious sacrifice.
<i>pūrvaraṅga</i>	Literally, “before the play”; the prologue or preliminary stage ceremonies sanctifying the

theater experience, which in the ancient tradition is not merely a means of mass communication but also of communion.

**rāga**

Melodic mode in Indian music, usually defined by set scales around which improvisations are created.

**Rāma**

Incarnation of the god Viṣṇu; chief character of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, one of the great epics of India.

**raṅgadvāra**

Literally, "door of the play"; the technical term for a section of the preliminaries.

**rasa**

Flavor, taste, color, residual essence; joyful consciousness; the major aesthetic goal of Sanskrit theatrical performance.

**sādharaṇīkaraṇa**

Universalization of individual emotions through identification with their archetypes, leading to evocation of *rasa*.

**samcāribhāva**

Transitory emotions; accessory or component feelings that rise and fall within the basic emotional states.

**sandhi**

Junctures or links in dramatic structure; spans. There are five.

**sandhyanga**

The sixty-four sublinks; span-elements.

**sāttvika abhinaya**

One of the four major dimensions of acting; the expression of emotions.

**sloka**

Verse forms appearing in Sanskrit plays.

**śṛṅgāra rasa**

The erotic or romantic sentiment.

**sthāna**

Stance.

**sthāyibhāva**

Basic emotions; the eight basic dominant emotive states inherent to human existence which,

generated on stage and thus transformed, evoke in the audience corresponding *rasa*.

<i>sātradhāra</i>	The stage manager or director of the play.
<i>sukumāra prayoga</i>	The lyrical, gentle style of dance.
<i>svara</i>	Notes used in Indian music.
<i>tala</i>	The metrical or time elements in Indian music; generally, rhythm.
Tamāshā	A form of rural theater in Maharashtra.
<i>tāṇḍava</i>	The style of dance derived from Tāṇḍu, denoting large open movements.
<i>tryaśra</i>	A triangular theater structure mentioned in the <i>Nāṭyaśāstra</i> .
<i>vācika abhinaya</i>	One of the four dimensions of acting; acting through the spoken word.
Vaiṣṇavism	A religious movement popular in medieval India in which Viṣṇu's incarnations are worshiped.
<i>vibhava</i>	Determinants or stimulants; that dimension of the stimulus serving to arouse the permanent or basic emotion ( <i>sthāyibhāva</i> ) is <i>ālambanavibhava</i> ; the stabilizing factors are <i>uddiṭpanavibhava</i> .
<i>vidūṣaka</i>	Jester; a category of characters in Sanskrit plays.
<i>vighna</i>	An obstacle the hero must overcome in order to achieve his desired objective.
<i>vikṛṣṭamadhya</i>	Medium-sized, rectangular theater structure.
<i>vīṇā</i>	Indian lute.

<i>vīra rasa</i>	The heroic sentiment.
<i>viṣkambhaka</i>	Introductory or supporting scene which gives the essential background of important events through characters of adequate status who are likely to possess such information. (In <i>The Vision of Vāsavadattā</i> such a scene comes before the beginning of Act VI.)
<i>vṛtti</i>	The four styles of production or dramatic tendencies.
<i>vyabhicāribhāva</i>	See <i>samcāribhāva</i> .
<i>vṛścikālatā</i>	"Scorpion-legged"; a cadence of movement where one leg is bent with the calf folded in, and the other back or sideways.
<i>yajña</i>	Sacrifice; a vedic rite reenacting the primordial self-immolation and resurrection of the Lord of Creatures.
Yakshagāna	A traditional dance drama form in Mysore (Karnāṭaka).

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